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SkyRiders

A Novel by LOU CAMERON
STORY BY HALL T. SPRAGUE AND BILL McGAW
Based on the screenplay by JACK DEWITT, STANLEY MANN, and GARRY MICHAEL WHITE

20TH CENTURY-FOX PRESENTS
A SANDY HOWARD PRODUCTION

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JAMES COBURN
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SKY RIDERS

LOU CAMERON

A FAWCETT GOLD MEDAL BOOK

Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Connecticut

SKY RIDERS

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SKY RIDERS

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Athens, August 23. The police would never know it, but the terrorist attack on the Bracken villa was going to be an inside job. Seducing the American millionaire's Greek gatekeeper, Spyrodon, had been assigned to Number Six.

Since Number Six was young and beautiful, her task had not been all that difficult, but since Number Six was also frigid, ordering her to start an affair with the often drunk and seldom washed old peasant had afforded her leader, Number One, some wry amusement.

The girl had offered several ingenious alternatives to the piquant commands of Number One, and, in truth, there were a dozen ways the WARA strike force could have broken through the light security the Bracken family deemed sufficient for their villa and surrounding estate just outside Athens. Forcing Number Six to bribe old Spyrodon with promises of future money and unlimited access to her firm young body had been as much an exercise of Number One's egomania as it had been the test of the girl's willingness to serve the Cause. Number Six, and all the other members of the World Activist Revolutionary Army, had to be shown, at every opportunity, that the word of Number One was law.

As Number One had discovered in choosing the next victims of WARA, Jonas Bracken was a creature of habit. The American had run a modest inherited import-export firm into a multinational business empire by having a steel-trap head for figures and keeping one eye always on

the clock. Time was money to Jonas Bracken, and neither was a commodity to be wasted. When Number One had learned the millionaire had scheduled a business meeting on his yacht for the morning of the 23rd, he'd assumed, correctly, that nothing short of World War III was likely to make the capitalist running dog change his plans.

Hence, as Jonas Bracken and his male secretary drove out through the gates, right on time, Number One and his squad of picked followers were waiting, just down the tree-lined road, in two nondescript black limousines. Neither Bracken nor his secretary, Henry Orkin, gave the six young people in the parked cars more than a passing glance. Later, when questioned by the police, Orkin would be unable to describe either car or remember the number of passengers. Bracken would recall five young men and a woman, as well as the makes of the cars and the fact that both had Greek license plates. When pressed he would remember that one of the men had his face buried in a map, that they seemed sort of "international-flower-child," and that he'd assumed they were looking for a place to have a picnic under the shade of the plane trees down the hill from his estate.

Try as he might, he would remember nothing else about them.

Inside the villa, Bracken's attractive young wife had finished her breakfast in bed, bathed, and slipped into expensive but tastefully simple casual clothes. It was the gardener's day off and she planned to do a little surreptitious pruning. The servants acted uncomfortable whenever she took a personal hand in any of the chores around the villa, but she was bored to tears with being waited on hand and foot, and perhaps if she was very careful, poor Andreas wouldn't notice she'd insulted his manhood by snipping off a few shoots here and there.

Stepping out in the hall, Ellen Bracken heard a commotion from the children's room and went to see what the fuss was about. She found poor Flora, the English nanny Jonas had insisted on hiring, trying to cope with what the young mother cheerfully admitted were a couple of adorable brats. Susie, aged three, was tearfully refusing to wear the playclothes Flora had picked out for her. Jimmy, a

worldly ten-year-old, had dressed himself and was insisting stridently that he didn't want any old breakfast and that he wanted to go out and play with the dogs. Jonas had purchased three Doberman attack dogs recently, and Jimmy seemed unable, or unwilling, to understand why he wasn't allowed to romp on the lawn with them. Keeping Jimmy out of the pool when no adults were about was a problem, too.

Ellen smiled at the distraught older woman and said, "You'd better let me take over, Flora. You look like you could use some strong black coffee, and these two barbarians need a good talking-to."

"If you please, mum, it's my *job* to take care of your children."

"I know, dear, and Mr. Bracken and I are both very pleased with the way you've been doing it. I just think, once in a while, a mother ought to carry her own cross. Why don't you run down to the kitchen and keep Cook company for a while?"

"Coo, I don't speak Greek," grumbled the nanny, even as she headed for the door with a relieved look. Ellen waited until she'd left before she faced her children with a hand on each hip and a look of mock anger on her face. It was an effort, but she managed not to smile at little Susie as she asked, "All right, what's all this nonsense about, missy? Are you going to be a big brave girl and wear the clothes Nanny picked out for you, or do you want Mommy to beat you with a big black whip?"

Susie looked up uncertainly. Then she dimpled and said, "Aw, you don't have a big black whip, Mommy. Jimmy says it's just make-believe. I betcha there isn't any big black whip. So there."

Ellen looked away to keep from laughing as she asked, "Would you believe a spank on the tushy? It's not funny, Susie. You're going to do as Nanny and your mommy say or you're going to be in a lot of trouble."

Down by the gatehouse, the treacherous servant, Spyrodon, turned off the electric alarm as he opened the wrought-iron gates to admit two black limousines. He shot a furtive look at the occupants, but the six young terrorists were wearing ski masks now. Each mask bore a

number on its forehead, but Number Six, in recruiting the gatekeeper to the Cause, had neglected to inform him of her secret identity. It was impossible for Spyrodon to tell which one of them was the ravishing brunette who'd come so unexpectedly into his hitherto dull and pointless existence. She'd be one of them, he knew. She'd promised that when they did whatever it was they meant to do here this morning, he, Spyrodon, would be going off with them. Just where they planned to go had been left a bit vague, but what did it matter? He'd waited for a chance like this all his life. A chance to have money, lots of money, and a warm lovely woman to share it all with.

As the last car passed through the gates, the rear doors opened on either side and a masked figure jumped out to vanish along the hedgerows on either side of the entrance. They carried what looked like submachine guns and moved like cats. They looked as if they'd had some military training, and Spyrodon supposed they were some sort of Communist guerillas. The girl had wasted a lot of time in bed telling him about the injustices of capitalist imperialism. Spyrodon hadn't paid too much attention. Her breasts had been firm young pomegranates, her thighs had been strong as a boy's, and anyway, he'd known all his life what it means to be poor.

Shooting a guilty grin at the big white house on the hill, Spyrodon shut the gate and locked it. If anyone came before his friends were done here, he knew how he was expected to warn them.

Farther up the drive, Number Two and Number Eight got out to run for the left wing of the villa. The attack dogs, chained in their pens on that side, sensed the intruders even before they rounded the corner.

Inside the villa, Jimmy said, "The dogs are barking!" and ran to the window as his mother, busy dressing Susie, raised her head with a puzzled frown. The sound a silencer-equipped gun makes can be heard only a few feet from the muzzle, and the french windows were shut. So when the dogs suddenly fell silent, Ellen said, "They've stopped. It was probably just a squirrel running across the lawn."

Jimmy put a hand on the latch and said, "I think I'd

better go and see, Mom. Dad says those dogs are trained not to bark unless it's important, and—"

"You're just looking for an excuse to run over to the kennels, Jimmy. You come right back here and help me with Susie. Then, after you've had your breakfast, we'll see about letting you feed the Dobermans, all right?"

The next victim was Flora, the nanny. The Englishwoman was out by the pool, half-hidden from the drive, as Numbers One and Six came around the corner, carrying silencer-equipped guns. Flora had bent over to pick up a toy near the pool's edge and didn't see the grotesque figures until she started to straighten up. She froze for a moment as the masks and weapons registered. Then she screamed. Once.

Number One fired. The white-uniformed nanny stopped in mid-scream as if someone had pulled the plug of an electric siren. She crumpled to the tile deck of the swimming pool as another bullet hit her, throwing her limp dead form into the water with a loud splash. Number Six walked over to the edge and stared down at the widening cloud of crimson in the chlorine-green water. Then she snickered. Number One said, "Let's go. Bedroom's over this way."

In the children's room, Jimmy had turned on the radio and the air was filled with bouzouki music from a local station. It was much too loud, but Ellen didn't mind. Susie was almost dressed, and after she got some orange juice into them, it might be fun to let them help her in the garden. They were all getting terribly spoiled, here at Jonas's Greek headquarters. Maybe if she could only learn a little more Greek, she and the children could get out more. This hothouse existence up here on the hill couldn't be good for any of them.

Jimmy said, "What's that? It sounds like someone's at the front door."

"The butler will answer it, dear," said Ellen, adding, "now, let's see about breakfast, shall we?"

The doorbell had, in fact, been rung by Numbers Four and Eleven. The Greek butler, puzzled that the gatekeeper hadn't alerted him, came down the hall to see who it might be. He opened the door with a slight but polite

frown and then, spotting the ski masks and guns in the hands of the two young men at the door, slammed it shut, with all his weight, on the foot of Number Four.

Number Eleven said, "Nice try," as he emptied his clip through the oaken door. The butler went down in a hail of bullets and splintered wood as Number Four, gritting his teeth at the pain in his injured foot, shoved the door open with his own weight, sliding the dead man across the blood-slicked marble of the foyer.

Stepping inside, Number Four glanced down and grunted, "This one's the butler we were told about. Gardener's got the day off. Chauffeur and secretary are with their boss. That leaves a cook and the kid's nanny to deal with. You know what the wife looks like?"

Number Eleven slipped another clip in his gun and nodded, saying, "Yes. Number One showed us her picture. What about her?"

"Don't shoot her or the kids. That's what about her. Anyone else we find in this place dies. Cover me—I'm going to sweep the servant's wing."

"You're covered. What's down the other way?"

"Family quarters. Number One and the dike are hitting there. Our job is to knock out the staff. We don't want anyone left alive to call the cops before we're clear with the hostages."

Not waiting for a reply, Number Four moved back to the kitchen and swept his eyes and the muzzle of his gun across the wood-fire range and cluttered ware of an old-fashioned Greek kitchen. How like a typical millionaire to let his servants toil over primitive cooking utensils while he and his spoiled family lolled at their ease in front of color television sets. Well, Jonas Bracken would soon learn there were other people in his world. People who were willing to share his wealth and power with him.

The cook's room was next to the kitchen pantry. Number Four had been made to study a floor plan of the house until he knew the whole layout. But when he kicked in the woman's door, the room appeared to be empty. A Greek movie magazine lay across the rumpled sheets of the bed. A candle burned in front of a religious icon over a Japanese television set on a carved peasant chest. Number

Four grimaced in distaste at the icon and went on to search the other rooms.

Meanwhile, in the children's room, Ellen Bracken had finished with Susie and turned as Jimmy gasped, "Who's that out there?"

Ellen followed her son's gaze and strangled a scream in her throat as she spotted the masked face peering in the window at them. There were two of them, at least, but the grotesquely masked and costumed Number One seemed to fill the window as he loomed there, fumbling with the latch. Jimmy asked, "Who are you? What do you want?" as Ellen grabbed his arm and hissed, "Be quiet and help me get Susie out of here!"

Susie, sensing the distress in her mother's voice, dropped her rag doll and began to cry as Ellen scooped her up in her free arm and, trying to carry both children at once, half carried and half dragged them out of the room.

The telephone. She had to reach the telephone in her own bedroom. Behind her, the dark outlines vanished from the children's window as the terrorists guessed her intentions.

The master bedroom was only a few paces down the hall. Ellen reached the open door with her children and slammed it shut behind her, locking it before she rushed across the room to the bedside telephone table.

As she picked up the receiver and started to dial, Jimmy said, in a surprisingly grown-up voice for a ten-year-old, "Mom! They're at this window, now! Two of them. They're wearing ski masks and . . . "

Tapping at the telephone she now suspected was dead, Ellen turned numbly toward the window just as the panes exploded inward in a shower of glass. Number One was hung up for a fraction of a minute by the torn curtains, and then, as Ellen gathered her two children close and backed into a corner of the room, the WARA leader tore the drapery down from the overhead rods with a savage wrench and started slowly to circle the bed, breathing heavily as Ellen faced him with such frozen-faced courage as she could still manage. Licking her lips, Ellen said, "My jewel box is over there on the dresser. I don't have much money, here at the house, but—"

"Tais-toi! We are not common thieves!" snapped Number One in a slight French accent, adding, "You will come with us, madame. Your carriage awaits you, outside."

"Anything you say, sir. Just don't hurt the children!"

"Vite, vite! I do not intend to say it again, madame!"

Picking Susie up, Ellen took Jimmy by the hand and allowed them to herd the three of them out into the hall. They met Number Eleven near the front door, and Ellen gagged in horror at the sight of the dead butler sprawled on the blood-spattered floor. Jimmy shrank closer to her side as he whispered, "What happened to Petros, Mom? Is he dead?"

Ellen squeezed his hand and murmured, "Hush, dear."

Number One asked Eleven, "Where is Four?"

"Looking for the cook, out back. She's not in the house, and—"

"Get him. We must be off. Where are Two and Eight?"

"In the cars, as ordered. They took out the dogs and the telephone lines and resumed their posts behind the wheels as we planned."

Number One's voice took on an oddly sinister purr as he asked, "As *we* planned, Number Eleven?"

"I meant as *you* planned, Number One."

"That's better. Get Four and join us out front." He prodded Ellen with his gun muzzle and added, "You, madame! Out to the cars and do as you're told. Do just as you're told, and you may live to see the sun go down, *hein?*"

The young mother and her children were hustled outside and forced into one of the cars. A bag was forced over Ellen's head, completely blocking her vision, as one of the terrorists asked, "The kids, too?"

Number One said, "Of course the kids too!"

"For God's sake, Susie's only three years old!" Ellen protested, and one of them hit her.

Susie was screaming hysterically. Young Jimmy kicked at one of the kidnappers and screamed, "You let my sister alone!" The boy was slugged brutally to the floor of the car and one of the terrorists shoved a gun muzzle against his neck, saying quite calmly, "Shut your fucking mouth or I'll blow your head off, kid!"

Although he was only ten, Jimmy was not a slow learner. He offered no further resistance as his hands were bound and another sack was forced over his head. Nearby, his mother wanted to tell him not to antagonize these obviously insane people further, but she was afraid to voice her opinion of their sanity.

By now the cars were moving, slowing down to retrieve the others as they ran across the lawn from either side. At the gate, Spyrodon was waiting with a knowing smile. He'd carried out his part of the bargain. It was time for his reward. He moved toward the lead car, expecting to be taken in with the others. Since the prisoners were unable to see, neither Ellen Bracken nor her children witnessed Spyrodon's "reward."

Number Six was the one who shot him. She'd asked Number One for the privilege and her leader had decided, all things considered, she'd earned the favor. Number Six emptied a whole clip into the surprised inside man as the car sped away, but although his life was spattered out of him all over the driveway, the memory of his loathsome thrusting flesh refused to go away.

It was odd, thought Number Six, how anticlimactic it was when you actually killed someone. She didn't get the chance that often, and, between confrontations, it seemed as if you'd go crazy if you didn't get a chance to off one of the mothers who helped the world close in on you. Then, when you actually got to blast them away in a cloud of gunsmoke and bloody froth, it all seemed so . . . banal?

Maybe if Number One would only give her time to waste an enemy of the Cause properly, it wouldn't be over so fast. Maybe if you did it slow, and watched the fear and pain in their eyes as the life oozed out of them, you'd get to feel the thrill of killing that everyone talked about.

Back at the villa, Sophia Kalamados waited a long time before she gingerly crawled out from under the bed she'd been hiding under all this time. Sophia was the Bracken's cook and the wife of Petros, the dead butler. She'd had no idea of what was going on as the sounds of the attack reached her in the kitchen. But Sophia had lived through

more than one revolution, and the Greek peasant is a survivor who knows enough to duck first and ask questions later.

It took Sophia only a few minutes to discover her husband's body, and for a time the frightened woman screamed in mindless anguish. Then she went to the house phone and, finding it dead, ran next door for help.

Although Jonas Bracken was happily married, many of his business associates were not. Some, in fact, were not the sort of men a prudent husband would want under the same roof with his wife and children.

Therefore, the multinational industrialist maintained a scattered score of residential properties in Europe, two or three in the neighborhood of Athens. This complicated matters for the Greek police when they first went looking for him. They finally located him at the beach cottage he'd leased in a secluded cove, several miles from the scene of his family's abduction.

That is, they located his private secretary, Henry Orkin. The millionaire was out on his private yacht, entertaining a client. When Captain Nikolidis, of the Greek police, asked who the client was and what the meeting was about, Orkin looked pained and said he'd call his employer on their ship-to-shore radiotelephone. Nikolidis didn't press the matter. He knew about the Arab merchant prince who'd landed in Athens the night before and, oddly, had never registered at any local hotel.

Orkin called the yacht and, when he got through to

Bracken, said in short, no-nonsense phrases, "It's a snatch. They have Ellen and the children. You'd better come in, sir. The police are here now."

Nikolidis had expected a longer conversation, but all Bracken said was: "Gotcha, I'm on my way!"

Orkin switched off and the captain asked, "Is your employer always this abrupt when his family gets kidnapped?"

Orkin shrugged and answered, "I don't know. It's never happened before. You know who Jonas Bracken is, don't you, Captain?"

"A very rich man, with connections in the right places. I have taken the liberty of running him through our computer at headquarters. Our raw data was fed to me on the police radio on my way out here. There is one thing about your Mr. Bracken that puzzles me. He has never been involved, in any way, in Greek politics."

Orkin smiled thinly and explained, "That's why he makes his home here, Captain. You've no idea what happened to our Latin American holdings when Chile went Red a few years back."

"I have a very good idea indeed, Mr. Orkin. I will admit, however, I see no reason for local radicals to be seeking revenge against your employer. Jonas Bracken would seem, in fact, to be a cut above your average—how do you say, wheeler-dealer?—when it comes to his business ethics."

"Jonas Bracken is not a wheeler-dealer," Orkin sniffed, adding, "He trades in commodities in a simple, straight-from-the-shoulder fashion. If he makes more money at it than most, it's simply because he's got a good head for figures and likes to read the fine print."

"I never meant to impugn your employer's honesty," Nikolidis soothed. "I only meant that a man in his position makes enemies, no matter how honest or dishonest he may happen to be. I told you about the note we found at the villa, did I not?"

"Of course. It sounds like the usual ransom note to me. That bit with the letters cut from some newspaper and pasted into a message on cheap notepaper is par for the course, isn't it?"

Nikolidis shrugged and said, "Our kidnappers are either very naïve or, perhaps, very subtle. The note was in English, so, of course, they had to use the Roman alphabet."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means they were unable to use a Greek newspaper, of course. The only papers that are not printed in the Greek alphabet here in Athens are the foreign editions. To be specific, the letters of the kidnapper's note were cut from advertisements in *Le Monde.*"

"Meaning the kidnappers are French?"

"Meaning, perhaps, one or more members of the gang reads *Le Monde.* There were French accent marks over several of the letters pasted to the note. We were able to trace at least one stylized capital letter to an advertisement in last week's *Le Monde.* The paper could have been purchased, of course, by anyone. One does not have to read French to cut individual letters from a French publication, eh?"

Lieutenant Dimitrios Sophos came in from the boat landing to report to his superior, "The launch is coming in from the yacht, sir."

Orkin noticed the captain's junior officer spoke English, in deference to his own ignorance of the Greek language. These Greek cops were nice enough guys, he decided. He could only hope their professional competence matched their manners. Captain Nikolidis looked like an old pro. He was one of those iron-fist-in-a-velvet-glove types, and he seemed to be a lad who did his homework. Young Dimitrios was a prettyboy. He looked a little wet behind the ears to be a police lieutenant. Orkin could only hope the locals knew what they were doing. God, back home they'd have had the FBI and everyone else on the case by this time.

It might have surprised Henry Orkin to know how much the soft-spoken captain had already learned about him, too. Orkin had been with Bracken Enterprises for nearly fifteen years, and in that time a man leaves a lot of computer readout. Orkin was not the priss he might seem on first meeting him. Jonas Bracken's confidential secretary was shrewd, tougher than he looked, and, by all accounts,

loyal to his employer. Nikolidis hadn't completely eliminated him as a suspect, but if it turned out that Henry Orkin was in any way involved in the abduction of his employer's wife and children, Nikolidis was going to be surprised.

Not *very* surprised . . . perhaps "disappointed" was a better word. Captain Nikolidis had answered too many police calls to eliminate any suspect completely.

The three of them went out to the landing, where other officers were waiting for the power launch approaching them. The launch was coming in fast, with a bone in its teeth. Nikolidis saw a tall man in a business suit at the helm and asked Orkin, "Is that Mr. Bracken?"

Orkin said, "Yes. When Jonas Bracken really wants a thing done, he does it himself."

The launch came in planing on its transom, and as Bracken cut the power just in time, the bow slammed down and sent a pistol-shot splash against the dock. Bracken swung the rapidly slowing boat in broadside and, as one of his crewmen threw a line to the nearest policeman, leaped ashore. He headed straight for his secretary. Orkin said, "This is Captain Nikolidis, sir."

The younger man nodded curtly. "Who has Ellen and the kids? How much do they want? Have they made contact yet?"

Nikolidis said, "There is a note at your villa. Nothing can be moved until we finish dusting for prints and—"

"Never mind all that. How much do they want?"

"The note did not mention terms. The kidnappers left a two-way radio. I think we'd all do well to be at your villa when and if they call on it, eh?"

Bracken nodded and said, "Let's go, then. Henry and I will follow in my limousine."

"Forgive me, sir, but you will be good enough to ride with me, in my vehicle. We have already wasted a good deal of time in locating you. I would like to question you about a few matters on our way to your villa."

Bracken hesitated a moment. Then he nodded curtly and said, "Gotcha. Let's get this show on the road!"

As young Dimitrios led the way to the captain's police cruiser, the captain silently sized the American up. Jonas

Bracken's appareant coldness, he knew, hid the warmer side of the man few people knew about. On the surface, Bracken was a typical self-made man, terse, brutally frank, and short with those he considered stupid or inefficient. He'd never found it necessary to broadcast the details of his many charities. His relief work among those earthquake victims in the Middle East had been buried in the back pages of a few newspapers. He'd set up a dummy corporation to hide his funding of that orphanage in Thrace. At this very moment, he seemed to be taking the kidnapping of his wife and children quite calmly, but Nikolidis had seen the same look in other men's eyes in the past—the why-is-this-happening-to-me look of a gunshot soldier trying to be brave.

The captain waited until they were seated in the back of his car together before he said, "We had the very devil of a time locating you and Mr. Orkin. That must have been a very secret meeting out there indeed."

"It was. The details are none of your business, either. How did the kidnappers get in past our servants? Were any of them hurt?"

"Your servants were murdered. All but the cook. These people we are dealing with used very little finesse. They simply shot their way in, seized your wife, your daughter, and your stepson, and—"

"Jimmy's not my stepson, exactly. He's my heir. I adopted him when I married his mother. I'm the only father Jimmy's ever known."

"Yes, but we must consider his real father, no?"

"What's that supposed to mean? I don't know where in blazes Ellen's first husband is right now."

"Ah, but, you see, we do. That is, we know about where he is. Your wife, forgive me, was most unfortunate in choosing the notorious Mr. McCabe as her first husband."

"Okay. The guy was a bum. What's that supposed to mean? It's all water under the bridge. Neither Ellen nor I have seen or heard from Jim McCabe in nearly ten years. For all we know, he's dead. McCabe was following a rather frantic life-style, the last I heard."

Nikolidis nodded and said, "The last *I* heard, he was

flying contraband goods for a ring of international smugglers, headquartered here in Greece."

"Jim McCabe's here in Greece?"

"He shares an apartment with a statuesque exotic dancer, when he chooses to visit Athens. Just where he is at this very moment is a matter for Interpol to worry about. We have his known haunts, how you say, staked out?"

"I don't get it. Are you saying Jim's a suspect in this case?"

"I am saying I wish to talk to him about it. Has it not occurred to you, by now, that your wife's former husband was a criminal—"

"Back off!" Bracken cut in, adding, "I don't like Jim McCabe. I never did. He put Ellen through hell in the few months she lived with him. McCabe's a gypsy, a womanizer, a bum, but, to give the devil his due, I can't see him doing anything to hurt Ellen or the kids."

"Why not? Didn't you take your wife—*his* wife—away from him while he was serving a short sentence for running guns?"

"I guess it might look that way, from the outside, but that's not the way it went down."

"Oh? Perhaps then you should tell me how you came into possession of this distressing young man's wife while he was in prison."

"Come on, it wasn't like that and Jim knows it. He and Ellen were all washed up before he was arrested. The guy was a jerk. A kid who just never grew up. He'd been a hotshot fighter pilot in the Korean mess, and later on he went from the poor-but-honest crop-duster bit to the more lucrative activities your hotshot flyboy can get himself into."

"You mean smuggling."

"Smuggling, gunrunning, dropping mercenaries into jungle clearings the UN might not have approved of all that much. Ellen met him on the Riviera, fell for his line, and . . . well, what the hell, my wife's a smart girl and you don't have to live too long with a flying jerk-off to know you made a bad deal."

"She had a child by him, though."

"Sure. That's what kept them together as long as she was able to stick it out. I think they were married eighteen months in all. It was on the rocks before he went to jail that time. Jim had done a bit of charter flying for me, and I'd met her socially. He left her and the baby stranded when they picked him up and, well, I offered to help."

Nikolidis smiled thinly and observed, "She seems to have been most grateful."

Bracken reddened and growled, "When this is over, I just might take you to Fist City for that crack, Captain! Ellen never asked me for a dime when she first came to me. She asked me, in fact, to help her get McCabe out of jail!"

"I take it you persuaded her to drop her misplaced loyalty?"

"You take it wrong. You take a lot of things wrong. In the first place, I had a mistress of my own at the time and Ellen was a mess. I felt sorry for her and the baby, and I, well, pulled a few strings to get McCabe's sentence reduced. I offered to finance them both until he could get his feet under him again, but Ellen didn't want to go back to him, and once he was out of the slammer, Jim was off to the Congo, running a one-man air force for some piss-pot African guerrilla group."

"Then, when did you marry your wife, Ellen?"

"A year or so later. I put her on the payroll, got her an apartment, and, well, things sort of sorted themselves out when we found out we were in love."

Bracken's voice suddenly choked off and he rubbed a hand across his face, looking away. Nikolidis reached for a cigar in his breast pocket, bit the end off, and lit it before he said, softly, "I apologize for putting you through all this, Mr. Bracken, but we must consider every angle, and this ex-husband of your kidnapped wife was, as you know, a man involved in criminal and guerrilla activities."

Bracken recovered with an effort and said, "I know. But we can forget Jim McCabe. I'm sure he knows nothing about all this and, if he did, I don't think he'd give a damn."

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The slipstream whistled through the bullet hole in the windscreen as Jim McCabe circled the seaplane over the rendezvous. The man at the controls was a lean whipcord-and-whalebone type with a lived-in face and prematurely graying hair. McCabe was dressed in nondescript work clothes, and behind him in the beat-up old plane, the stripped-down interior was crammed with contraband merchandise his present clients did not see fit to inform the Greek customs office about. It was hard enough to make a buck on Japanese color sets and transistor radios these days even without paying import duties.

The stretch of coast selected for the meet was off the main shipping channels, but there were a few more craft in sight today than McCabe would have liked to see down there. He spotted the Egyptian dhow he was looking for and made a low pass, casing the inlet for unexpected and unwelcome company. The all-clear signal hung from the dhow's lateen masthead and the other craft in view seemed to be Greek fishing boats. The nearest one had a net over the side. Unless the local fuzz had gotten very cute indeed, it was time he made his move.

McCabe dragged the landing area once more for laughs, circled into the wind, and came in flat and full-throttle. The cobalt-blue water reached up to grab the hull, and McCabe swung his nose toward the innocent-looking antique he'd agreed to meet here. How they got the shit ashore and into the trucks was their problem.

A ragtag band of Greek seamen watched from the dhow as McCabe taxied alongside. He cut the engine as a man leaned over the rail to grab a wingtip, skewing the plane's pontoon against the teakwood hull with a dull thump. McCabe climbed up out of the cockpit, throwing a line to another man and calling in Greek, "There's a color television set lashed behind my seat. Leave it alone. It's mine."

A portly figure in a rumpled white suit and Royal Navy cap met McCabe as the latter climbed aboard the sailing ship. McCabe had often wondered how a Kraut like Auerbach rated a British officer's cap, but he'd never thought to ask. Auerbach was one of those shifty types who lie when the truth is in their favor, and McCabe had heard all the old war stories he ever wanted to.

Auerbach smiled, but his eyes looked worried as he said, "If you want one of those sets, it will have to come out of your cut, right?"

McCabe jerked a thumb over his shoulder and said, "Wrong. You owe me for a .50-caliber round through the windshield. So I figure we're even."

"*Mein Gott!* Were you spotted picking up the merchandise?"

"Not to worry. I took off through a cordon of police boats, but nobody was hurt and I buzzed the mothers too low for them to have taken down my wing numbers, even if I was flying with the same wing numbers this kite's registered with. Your pals on shore got away, too. I came in under the radar, and there's no way they can trace this shit to you and yours."

Auerbach managed a weak smile and, as his crew swarmed over the plane to unload it, led McCabe below to his cabin. McCabe said, "I need a drink and some bread, in that order. You have anything you want me to fly back to Beirut tonight?"

Auerbach poured two paper cups full of very good contraband Scotch and handed one to McCabe before he said, "I think we'd be wise to, as you say, cool it, for the moment."

"Why, because the Lebanese fuzz took a couple of shots at me this afternoon? Shit, you've got to expect a few shots in this business, Karl."

"You haven't heard about it, then? It was on the radio and in the afternoon papers, McCabe."

"What was in the papers? My game of chicken with the Lebanese harbor patrol?"

"It's not that, Jim. It's your son. He and your ex-wife have been kidnapped. There was a little girl, too. Wouldn't that be the kid Ellen and that fellow Bracken had?"

"Yeah, they have a daughter, I think. What's this about Jimmy? I haven't read a paper all week."

Auerbach reached for a Greek newspaper on a nearby shelf and handed it to McCabe, saying, "I am truly sorry about this, my friend."

Quietly, Jim McCabe took the paper and spread it open. The headlines read, "DAWN KIDNAP OF AMERICAN INDUSTRIALIST'S FAMILY. NO CONTACT WITH THE KIDNAPPERS YET."

McCabe tossed the paper aside and sipped his drink as Auerbach asked quietly, "Are you all right, Jim?"

McCabe's voice was desperately cool as he said, "Bracken's got more money than a dog has fleas. He'll get them back. Old Jonas always has been able to get anything he wanted out of anybody."

"*Gott im Himmel*, Jim! It's your own son they're holding!" McCabe didn't answer, and the German added, "Your wife, too."

"Ex-repeat-*ex*-wife!" snapped McCabe. "I hardly remember her, and, what the fuck, she ditched me while I was in the slammer, remember?"

"I remember, Jim. I remember her coming to me for help, too. You'd treated her like . . . well, not very nice, *nicht wahr?* You were already separated, and you, as I remember, were living with a very pneumatic blonde at the time. Ellen tried to bail you out, Jim. I gave her what I had to spare, but it was not enough and—"

"Aw, stuff a sock in it and let's talk about my money!"

"You will get your money. I thought, considering what happened, you might be more worried about Ellen and little Jimmy than . . . *ach,* I see why that bullet through your windshield never stopped you. To die, a man must have a heart, *nicht wahr?*"

McCabe took a stiffer jolt of Scotch and repeated, "The

money, Karl. I didn't risk my ass to talk over old times with you. I flew that shit in duty-free because I need the bread!"

Auerbach nodded and said, "I have your money, Jim. I have never known a man who was so in love with money, or a man who went through it so fast! Tell me, Jim, what do you *do* with all the money you make?"

"I use it, chump!"

"I know, but, on what?"

"On *me,* of course! Come on, quit stalling and lay some long green on me. You need that cork?"

"That what?"

"The cork in that bottle, Karl. I think it will just fit the hole those mothers blew in my windshield!"

Auerbach said, "Help yourself," and began to count out a stack of bills as McCabe pulled the cork from the bottle of Scotch, licked it clean, and tucked it in his shirt pocket. The German handed him the money and observed coldly, "You had better get a new windshield, Jim. You had better keep a low profile for the next few days, too. The police will know by now that you are the kidnapped boy's father and—"

"Hey, come on, do you think I'd be the kind of shit that would snatch his own kid for money?"

Auerbach's voice was cold as he answered, "For money, I don't know what you'd do, Jim. Sometimes I do not think I want to know you at all."

Ellen Bracken had no idea where she and the children were. The ride had been long and uncomfortable

and little Susie had been carsick. The kidnappers had finally removed the bag from Susie's head, after she'd started to strangle in her own vomit, but although Susie had seen the last few miles of passing countryside, her three-year-old descriptions of "lots and lots of rocks" had been of little help when Ellen managed to question her about it.

The dark chamber they were being held in was divided by a newly improvised screen of raw lumber and the sort of wire mesh used to pen pigs. Ellen and the children had been locked in the section away from the single door and one high window. The floor was solid stone, and the walls seemed to be stone covered with mouldering water-streaked plaster. The four walls met above their heads in a Byzantine vault, and when there was enough light to see clearly, the dank old plasterwork seemed to be covered with religious frescoes of some kind. The murals were badly faded and whole sections had fallen away, exposing the damp stonework behind the plaster, but there was enough left to tell the frescoes were very old, painted in the Greek Byzantine style. It was possible they were in the crypt of some forgotten church, or even an ancient tomb. When Susie had complained that the "people on the walls" were scary, Ellen had shushed her and murmured, "It's all right, dear. Those people are saints." She hadn't added that right now she was far more frightened of the very real people who'd kidnapped them.

One of them lounged on an army cot near the door, a submachine gun across his, or her, lap. It was hard to tell, in this dim light, whether the one called Number Six was male or female. Number Six was dressed in some sort of black uniform and wore the same numbered ski mask as the others. Ellen had tried to talk to Number Six, asking for some bedding or at least some drinking water for herself and the children. If Number Six understood English, French, or Ellen's limited Greek, he, or she, gave no indication of having heard her.

Ellen had lost track of the time and was half dozing against the wall with Susie in her lap when a flashlight suddenly shone in her face and the one they called

Number One snapped, "*Alors,* on your feet, madame! We are going to take your picture!"

In French, the leader told Number Six, "Open the doorway. I want the imperialist to see them clearly in the photos we shall send him with our demands."

Number Six answered in a feminine voice, and Ellen kept her own face uncomprehending as she got to her feet with the baby in her arms. If they didn't know she understood French, there was a chance she'd overhear something she might be able to use against them, when and if Jonas got them out of this awful place. Number Six was a girl; after all, and she had understood her prisoner's request for creature comforts. Ellen wondered numbly what could have turned her into such a hard unfeeling person. Couldn't she and the others see how young the children were? Whatever grudge these terrible people might have against her and Jonas, they had no reason to treat innocent children like this.

Number Six opened the padlock on a hinged section of the partition and motioned Ellen and Jimmy out with the muzzle of her gun. Number One said, "Back there, against the wall," and Number Six tittered. Ellen understood the double meaning of "up against the wall," but right now she didn't think it was very funny.

Jimmy, at his mother's side, said, "Susie's thirsty and covered with dry puke, mister. Can't we have any water?"

Number One said, "Be quiet, you spoiled rich brat! Right now the three of you are lucky to be alive!"

Jimmy balled his small fists and stared up at the looming dark figure defiantly as he jeered, "Wow, are you ever brave! I'll bet you really scare the little kids on your block, huh?"

Ellen put her free hand on Jimmy's shoulder and murmured, "Hush, dear."

But Jimmy insisted, "He's yellow, Mom! He's a bigshot, pushing you and me around with that big gun and all his pals behind him, but I'd like to see him talk this tough around my *dad!*"

Number One stepped forward silently and slapped Jimmy across the face, hard, as he purred, "Your so-called

dad is not here, *mon petit cochon!* Remember this before you open that mouth of yours again, *hein?*"

In English, Number Six said, "Why do we put up with their insults, Number One? I say kill the three of them and have done with it!"

Ellen knew the words were for her and Jimmy's benefit, but that didn't soften the menace in the guerrilla girl's evil voice. Pulling her son closer, Ellen said, "Be quiet, Jimmy. Don't say another word."

Number One waited until he saw the boy was cowed for the moment. Then he raised the camera in his free hand and said, "That's better. Why don't the three of you look at the birdie and say cheese?"

There was a blinding flash and Susie whimpered.

Ellen hugged the child closer and stammered, "Who are you people? What do you want with me and my children?"

Number One snapped another picture and said coldly, "We are the World Activist Revolutionary Army, and this is a People's Jail. You and your spoiled brats are going to help our cause in spite of yourselves!"

"Cause? What cause?"

"Our struggle to liberate the oppressed peoples of the world. To liberate them from the sort of oppression your husband and all his bloated capitalist friends stand for!"

The camera flashed again as Ellen began to understand the young man's mad obsession, or, rather, as she thought she understood it.

Her eyes filled with pinwheeling stars from the flash, Ellen asked, "Is this some sort of Communist organization, here?"

Number One snapped, "What do you take me for, a mere, how you say, parlor pink? WARA is not affiliated with those Soviet betrayers of the Marxist dream!"

"Are you Maoists, then?"

"Sacre bleu! Do I look like a Chinaman?"

Despite her position, Ellen had to smile as she chided, "I don't know. I've never seen your face."

Number One snapped another picture, lowered the camera, and said in a voice absolutely devoid of even sarcastic humor, "It is well for you, madame, that you have never gazed on my features. I can assure you, how-

ever, I am neither a Russian nor a Chinese. My followers and I are not affiliated with any political group a capitalist's baggage like yourself might have heard of."

"This WARA of yours is something new, then?"

"Not new, madame. Inevitable. Neither capitalism nor the mock socialism of any established government satisfies our demands for simple justice and equality for all men."

Ellen glanced down at Susie and her son and murmured, "Is this what you call simple justice and equality for all? My children are hungry and thirsty. We need some blankets and . . ."

But Number One wasn't listening.

Turning to Number Six, he said in French, "Put the pigs back in their pen. I have to see that the hog of hogs receives these pictures."

Ellen started toward the door in the pig-wire partition, holding Jimmy by the hand. Number Six swung her gun muzzle to cover the three of them as she hissed, *"Vache!* You understand French!"

Ellen froze, facing the gun muzzle, and licked her lips before she said quietly, "It's hardly a secret. I asked you for water and some blankets in French before, remember?"

Number Six snapped, "I'll give you a full clip in your painted face, cunt, if you pull any more cute tricks! *Compris?"*

Ellen stammered, "What are you talking about? What tricks? Can't either of you seem to understand my babies and I are completely at your mercy?"

Number One laughed, an odd, twisted laugh, as he gloated, *"C'est bon!* See that you remember you are at our mercy, madame. And now, get in your cage like an obedient animal and perhaps, just perhaps, I may see fit to let you live a few more hours."

He waved the camera and added, "We don't really need the three of you alive, you know. These pictures will convince your husband you and the children are alive and well. I have not yet made up my mind whether we'll have any further need for you to weary us with

your endless demands. I would suggest, under the circumstances, you learn to keep your mouth shut, eh?"

The color television set was a big hit at Madame Irene's Bar and Parlor House. Jim McCabe was holding court at the zinc-topped bar, watching a Greek sports program while a dirty-faced Street Arab shined his shoes and the bartender kept his glass filled with better booze than most of Madame Irene's customers rated.

McCabe, for reasons he might have denied had anyone asked him about them, was slightly bombed as he watched the television screen with slowly growing interest. The sports show featured a barnstorming air circus that called itself the Sky Riders.

McCabe had thought at first that it was going to be one of those old-fashioned wing-walking shows with surplus Stearman biplanes and some clown writing his name in smoke at the controls of a beat-up Jungmeister.

But the Sky Riders seemed to be flying wiithout airplanes. The barnstormers were using delta-wing hang-gliders to thrill the crowd.

McCabe knew little more about hang-gliders than the average magazine reader. The triangular Rogallo wing had been developed as an odd spin-off of the NASA space program long after McCabe had been mustered out of the air force. He'd flown old-fashioned sailplanes a few times in the past, and while silent gliding was fun, it hadn't struck McCabe as a practical way to get anywhere in particular.

The television camera followed one of the Sky Riders through a series of bewilderingly agile aerial nip-ups, and McCabe muttered, "How did he do that? How do you *steer* one of those glorified paper kites?"

There were about seven or eight of them, as close as McCabe could tell. As an old fighter pilot he had an eye for quickly adding up the size of any airborne formation, but the camera panned back and forth and the crazy kids were all over the sky at once. It was hard to remember there were no engines thrustings those darting delta-wings through the summer air. The hang-gliders had fantastic wing loadings, and the barnstormers were good. Every time it looked as if one of them was about to run out of sky, he'd catch a rising thermal and chandelle up again in a floating turn. One of them seemed to be a girl, to judge from the curves inside that circus costume dangling under the dart-shaped canopy of her dancing glider. The camera followed her up and up as McCabe marveled: "A loop? You can't loop a hang-glider, goddamm it!" And then, as if she'd heard him, the long-limbed girl rolled out and over into a perfect Immelmann and McCabe laughed, "Atta girl! A regular Red Baron razzle-dazzle if I ever saw one. We shoulda had you with us on the Yalu!"

Another hang-glider filled the screen, and McCabe saw there were two figures under the flapping triangular canopy. It was a muscular-looking guy and another chick. She was smaller than the big broad who stunted so well, but built like the well-known brick edifice of wistful legend.

McCabe hadn't known two people could ride the same hang-glider, but, when he thought about it, it scanned. How else would anyone ever learn to fly one of the damned things?

He watched a husky black youth catch a thermal and spiral up it with long twin streamers trailing from his wingtips, and as the sun caught the Dacron canopy for a moment, he wondered idly what controlled the roll and angle of attack. There were no ailerons or flaps. Just those two triangular panels of fluttering cloth, stretched like bat's wings on three stiff tubes of Duralumin. Yet the self-styled Sky Riders had the same control over their

kites as an old-fashioned sailplane pilot. It was hard to figure.

The screen went blank for a moment. Then a Greek newscaster came on to say, in his own language, "We interrupt this program to bring you this latest news bulletin."

McCabe said, "Nuts!" and pointed at his empty glass for the bartender's attention. As the glass was refilled, on the house, the newscaster said, "Our mobile unit is now at the villa of American industrialist Jonas Bracken, where, this morning, armed terrorists massacred four servants and abducted Ellen Bracken and the couple's two children. This afternoon . . . "

"Change the fuggin' channel!" snapped McCabe, gulping a slug of Scotch, neat.

It was McCabe's set. So the bartender did as he was told. He switched over to the French-language channel and McCabe muttered, "Shit!" as the screen was filled with the image of Jonas Bracken, speaking English as he said, "We've been waiting all day for some word from the people holding my wife and children. So far, they've not seen fit to inform us of their demands, if they have any demands, as I assume . . . "

"Jerk!" McCabe muttered into his drink. "Can't you see they want to make you sweat? Why can't you just hang in there until they get in touch and then pay the mothers? It's not as if you haven't got the bread, old buddy. Everybody knows you've got enough money to ransom a full platoon of wives and children!"

On the screen, Bracken was saying, "I am offering a reward of one hundred thousand dollars to anyone, anywhere, with knowledge of my wife and children's whereabouts. No questions will be asked of anyone returning them safe and sound, and I give my word that all communications, from any quarter, will be kept in strictest confidence. Address all communications to Bracken Enterprises or call us at . . . "

But McCabe wasn't listening. He was headed for the door with one shoe still unshined and a hunting glint in his eye. It wasn't clear, even to McCabe, whether it was the money or something else. Something he'd thought he'd gotten over a long time ago. But no matter what it was,

Ellen's jerk-off second husband was about to get the professional help he so obviously needed.

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The entrance to the Bracken estate resembled the gates of a fortress under siege as Jim McCabe drove up from Athens. Reporters, newscasters, well-wishers, and general pains in the ass had converged from all over Europe in a milling mass of shouting, cursing, pleading confusion. McCabe slowed down and honked his horn. Nobody paid the least attention. He threw the car in low gear and starting plowing through to the gate just slow enough to allow the more agile to get out of his way or, if they didn't, to survive the impact with minor bruises. An armed guard suddenly loomed in front of him with a submachine gun. The muzzle was pointed at his windshield. So McCabe stopped and stuck his head out to shout, "I'm here to see Bracken. Tell him it's Jim McCabe."

The guard kept him covered while he spoke into a walkie-talkie, and a million years went by. A photographer took McCabe's picture, not having the slightest idea who he might be. Then the guard lowered the gun, waved at two other unarmed men at the gate, and motioned McCabe through as the gates swung open for a moment. A television sound truck tried to follow, and the guard shot its left front tire out. It was nice to see Bracken had hired himself some security finally. What kind of an asshole left his family guarded by one unarmed

peasant in a poor country while he flaunted a nine-figure bank account?

McCabe drove up to the villa. He knew the way. Once, right after Ellen and her second husband had moved in, and McCabe was very drunk, he'd spent a few hours watching from outside the walls for some glimpse of the kid he and Ellen had managed to produce, back in the Neolithic Age.

He hadn't seen his kid, but he'd watched the house a long time, and more than once he'd flown over it in his plane. A couple of times he'd seen dots on the lawn or near the swimming pool that might have been kids. His son might have been one of the dots. It was hard to tell from a plane. For all he knew, the little jerk had two heads.

The drive was blocked with police and other vehicles near the front entrance. McCabe parked and got out. He went up to the bullet-scarred door and opened it without bothering to ring. A startled servant met him in the foyer and tried to find out who he was as McCabe brushed by, muttering, "You'd better do something about cleaning up that blood before the marble's stained for keeps."

With the bewildered servant trailing in his wake, McCabe bored through to the distant sound of voices and burst in on Bracken, Henry Orkin, and a handful of police officials in Bracken's study. They ignored McCabe as they listened intently to the tape cassette that Orkin was playing for them. McCabe froze in the doorway as he realized it was Ellen's voice they were listening to.

The tape was of poor quality, but the kidnapped woman's fear came through: " . . . They haven't harmed us, Jonas. Jimmy's being very brave and Susie's fine, too."

The transmission suddenly ended in a kitten-claws' hiss and Orkin sighed, "That's it. Tape ran out."

Captain Nikolidis glanced at Jonas Bracken and asked gently, "Her voice, sir?"

Bracken nodded numbly and said, "It was Ellen, all right. I—"

Then Orkin held up a hand for silence and said, "Hold it! There's more on the reel. I think they must have wiped something she said."

Orkin turned up the volume as Ellen's voice picked up again: "Jonas, I'm directed to tell you we're prisoners of the World Activist Revolutionary Army . . . uh, which is fighting the tyranny of worldwide imperialism."

Lieutenant Sophos whispered, *"Skata!* It's that WARA group we've heard so much about!"

"Be quiet!" snapped Nikolidis as Ellen's voice continued, "To gain our safe release . . . you will have to raise twenty-five million American dollars. They give you only forty-eight hours. If you refuse, or delay, they intend to execute us, one at a time . . . . Jonas, dear, I . . ."

The hissing resumed and Orkin sighed, "They cut her off again, sir. I don't think there's much more tape left and . . . yeah, that's it. End of the cassette."

Bracken was ashen-faced. He stared down at the tape recorder as if he expected a spitting cobra to rise out of it at any moment. Captain Nikolidis said, "They are insane. They must know it's impossible for anyone to raise such an amount on short notice."

Bracken muttered, "I can raise it, if I have to, and it looks like I have to." He shook himself, as if trying to awaken from a nightmare, and as he raised his head his eyes met those of McCabe in the doorway. Nikolidis followed his gaze as McCabe threw a mock salute. The Greek officer frowned and asked, "Who are you? How did you get in?"

Bracken said, "I knew he was coming. He has a right to be in on this."

"Ah, this gentleman is a friend of yours, then?"

"Not exactly, but he's Jimmy's father."

Nikolidis exchanged glances with his junior partner and smiled thinly as he said, "Ah, yes, we know about Mr. McCabe." Then he turned back to Orkin and said, "What about the second cassette they sent you, Mr. Orkin?"

Orkin looked up from the tape recorder and said, "It's ready to go." He flicked the play button and the voice of a man, speaking with a slight French accent, said, "Attention to orders, Bracken! By now you will have found the two-way short-wave radio we left in your

wife's room. You will leave it turned to the frequency we selected. At exactly sixteen hundred hours, the day after tomorrow, your time to raise the money will have elapsed. You will switch on the radio we left you and you will say one word. If the word is no, we shall kill your family, starting with the youngest member. If the word is yes, you shall then receive further instructions. Over and out."

The recorder fell silent and McCabe asked, "What in the hell is a World Activist Revolutionary Army, for God's sake?"

Nikolidis said, "We know a little about them. WARA is a tightly organized anarchist group, led by a distressing young man we have reason to believe is an insane French radical. We don't have a name to go with him, but his followers call him Number One. He was active in the Paris student riots a few years back. Rumor has it he's from a good family. We know he started out with a good deal of money. His own, or perhaps some he looted during the Paris disturbances."

"How many followers does he have?"

"We don't know. Surely more than a dozen, less than a hundred. WARA has recruited from the political lunatic fringe in France, Spain, Italy, and, I regret to say, our own country. He has several Americans with him. Your FBI and Interpol have been trying to get, how you say, a handle on their true identities. We have warrants on WARA involving murder, arson, robbery, and now kidnapping."

Bracken said, "I have connections in, well, left-wing circles. Do you think anyone from behind the Iron Curtain might be able to help?"

Nikolidis shook his head and said, "I doubt it. WARA's so-called struggle is neither Communist nor Fascist. I don't think they have a rational political goal at all. They are only interested in causing chaos and anarchy."

McCabe smiled wryly and mused, "Anarchists of the World Unite?"

Nikolidis nodded and said, "I told you their leader was not a rational man. One informant reported, just before he vanished, that Number One was badly wounded in the

Paris riots. He's on drugs for the constant pain of his untreated injuries and . . . Never mind, we shall find them, and rescue the hostages." He turned to Bracken and added, "You will not have to pay that ransom, Mr. Bracken. I, Nikolidis, give my word as a man on that!"

Bracken shot him an alarmed look and said, "I can raise the twenty-five million. I may have to liquidate a few holdings, but—"

"I don't want them paid off!" Nikolidis cut in, waving at the window. "Those people they left dead out there were *Greek*. One, I'll admit, was British, but murdered under Greek jurisdiction, nevertheless. We don't just want WARA for kidnapping and terrorism, sir. We want them for murder, and, by Theo, I mean to make them pay!"

McCabe snarted, "Sure, it'll be a cinch. You don't know who they are or where they're holding Ellen and the kids. Lots of luck!"

Nikolidis snapped, "We will have WARA and the hostages!" as he swept, rather grandly, from the room.

Young Sophos and the other officers followed, a trifle confused. Bracken looked wanly at McCabe and muttered, "Well, Jim, how long has it been, nine years?"

"Close enough. What are we going to do about Ellen and the kids?"

"Pay the bastards off, I guess. At least we know they're still alive."

Henry Orkin murmured, "You don't have that much cash on hand, sir. Not by half. You know how much of your assets are tied up in holdings and credit."

Bracken shrugged and said. "I want a list of all my holdings and who owes what to whom. Screw the people we owe, and put some pressure on anyone who owes us. Unload that blue-chip stock we've been holding, at a loss, if you have to, and see if the Skouris Trust still wants those tankers we've been dickering over. You know the way it's done, Hank!"

Orkin started to say something. Then, catching the look in Bracken's eye, he shrugged and went to a phone across the room. He picked it up and muttered softly, "Put me through to Zurich on the private line."

McCabe leaned against the door jamb and observed, "Twenty-five big ones is a lot of bread, Jonas. Even if you get it together in time, we have no way of knowing those wild men will keep their word."

Bracken said, "There's nothing else I can do. Look, I know you're worried about Jimmy, but there's nothing you can do for him, so—"

"You mind if I sort of stick around?"

"Of course not. I'm afraid I'm going to be very busy, though."

"You just do your own thing, then, baby. Meanwhile, I've got a few connections of my own and . . ." He saw the look of distaste in the other man's eyes and snapped, "Okay, so we don't move in the same social circles. I don't like you all that much, either."

Bracken moved over to a free phone on Orkin's desk and started to dial as he said, "I know we want the same thing, Jim. I'm as attached to your son as you are, and forgive me, but I think I'm free to say I think a little more of Ellen and our own child than you're capable of understanding."

"Yeah, I know. Ellen must have told you what a mutt I was, huh?"

Bracken got through to his party in Zurich and ignored the thrust to say into the receiver, "Herr Kestleman, *bitte. Hier schpricht* Jonas Bracken."

While he waited to be put through, Bracken covered the receiver with his hand and murmured, "If you need a drink of anything, feel free to ask one of the servants."

"Up yours," muttered McCabe, leaving the room with his hands in his pockets. Where, he wondered, was that effing Greek cop? The guy talked like a jerk, but at least he made more sense than Ellen's new loverboy!

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Ellen Bracken still had no idea where she and the children were or just how long they'd been there. A wan sliver of gray light from the narrow lancet window was all she had to see by. The kidnappers had finally given her a bucket of water, but the children were dozing fitfully on the stone floor of their improvised cell. Susie seemed all right, but Jimmy had developed a hacking cough that worried Ellen.

She put a hand to his warm brow, gasped at how feverish he was now, and tore a strip from the hem of her blouse. Wetting it in the water pail, she spread it on the sleeping boy's forehead. The movement woke him and Jimmy started to sit up. Ellen held him down and whispered, "Lie, still, dear. I just want to clean you up a bit, okay?"

Jimmy reached for the rag, saying, "Aw, I can do it myself, Mom."

As Jimmy started to wash his own face, little Susie opened her eyes and asked sleepily, "Mommy? Are we still here?"

Jimmy snorted, "Of course we're still here. Gee whiz, can't you see that?" Then he added, in a surprisingly adult tone, "We won't be here much longer, though. I'll bet Dad's coming to get us out! Don't you think Dad's coming, Mom?"

Ellen said, "I'm sure he is, dear. How do you feel?"

"I'm all right. I've just got something stuck in my throat."

The boy coughed, a long wheezing cough, and Ellen got to her feet to go over to the pig-wire screen. Number Six was sprawled on the army cot, apparently fast asleep. Ellen shouted, "Wake up! My son's not well and we need a doctor in here!"

Number Six opened one eye, growled, *"Chamelle!"* and rolled over with her back to the captives.

A few minutes later, someone knocked on the single door. Number Six muttered, *"Merde!"* and swung her feet to the floor, rising to slide the heavy bar aside and open the door. A man with a numeral 2 on his ski mask came in with a tray of four mess kits. He handed the food to Number Six and left without a word. The guerrilla girl put the tray on her cot and slammed and bolted the door behind him. Then she put one mess kit aside for herself and came over to slide the tray under the edge of the pig wire without comment.

Ellen murmured, "Thank you." But Number Six didn't answer. She went to sit back down on the cot and began to eat her own rations with noisy gusto. Ellen called out, "My children are catching cold. I need something to cover them."

Number Six chewed her food in sullen silence.

Ellen asked, "Didn't you hear what I said? You must have a blanket somewhere! What's the matter with you? Can't you speak?"

"Use your blouse," suggested Number Six, with a delicate belch.

"You want us all to get sick, don't you? You want us all to catch pneumonia and die in this awful place! God damn you, I want some blankets for my children!"

Number Six shrugged and said, "I don't care what you pigs do. The movement has not trained me to run a hotel business, *hein?"*

"I can see that! Your only business is violence, destruction, and death!"

"Madame is too kind, but flattery will get you nowhere."

Ellen bent to pick up one of the mess kits. She gagged at the greasy-looking contents and asked, "What is this

muck? The children can't eat it. They haven't had a proper meal since you people kidnapped us!"

"This is a People's Jail, and you are being treated like prisoners of war. We share the same living conditions here. I am truly sorry we are out of caviar, but you'll be expected to eat the same rations as the rest of us."

Ellen snapped, "Then eat it *all*, you silly bitch!" as she slammed her own mess kit against the wire mesh. The greasy ill-cooked mush spattered through the wire, some of it hitting Number Six as she sat there on her cot.

The WARA member sat there for a long deliberate moment. Then she put her own mess kit aside and got to her feet silently. Number Six unlocked the gate in the mesh with cold calm and stepped inside, locking the gate behind her as Ellen stood her ground. In the corner, Jimmy half rose, asking, "Mom?"

Ellen's eyes narrowed as she eyed the catlike form of Number Six. She said, "Stay out of this, darling. If this nasty little bitch is looking for a fight, she came to the right place!"

Ellen waited for her enemy with manicured hands half raised in what even she realized was a parody of a boxer's stance. Ellen Bracken hadn't had a physical confrontation in her adult life, but she was a frightened mother, fighting for her children, as the athletic Number Six lashed out.

She'd never had a chance, of course. Number Six slapped her guard aside and bored in, smashing the softer woman back against the damp plaster wall with a series of vicious cutting blows. Ellen's lip was split and one eye was puffing shut as she fought back with all her strength. Somewhere Susie was screaming at the top of her lungs, and Jimmy was flailing at Number Six with his small hard fists. The black-clad WARA member backhanded the boy into a far corner with a savage laugh, shouting, "After I kill your mother, I shall deal with you, *mon petit!*"

Ellen lunged forward, trying to drive her nails into the eye slits of the other's mask, but Number Six slammed a balled fist into her face, knocking her full length on the stone floor.

And then a man's voice roared, "Stop it, Number

Six! What is the matter with you? Have you forgotten your orders?"

"She started it," said Number Six, stepping back as Number One came in. Number One snapped, "Get out. I shall deal with you later."

Ellen protested weakly from the floor, "I only asked for some blankets!"

Number One helped her to sit up as he knelt beside her, dabbing at her bruised face with a pocket handkerchief. He waited for her to recover herself before he got to his own feet and stood near the door, one thumb through the sling of his own machine pistol. He said, "Your husband seems to be raising the money, madame. He must want you back after all."

Ellen looked at him, wiped her bleeding mouth, and asked, "Are you going to let us go?"

"You have my word you will be released, very soon, but first you will send him another message."

Ellen shook her head, and as Jimmy came over to kneel at her side, she said, "I refuse to send another word until I get proper treatment for my children."

Number One swung his machine pistol's muzzle around to cover Jimmy as he slowly and deliberately removed his ski mask with the free hand, saying, "I see you still take me for a mere kidnapper, madame."

Ellen gasped despite herself as she saw the ruined face the mask had been hiding. Number One said, "My nose, cheekbone, and part of my jaw were caved in by a rifle butt while I was pleading for Sweet Reason, Madame Bracken. You do remember the Paris student riots of some years ago?"

"Yes, we read about them in the papers."

"I did not read about them in the papers, madame. I was there."

"I can see that. How awful for you it must have been!"

Number One shrugged and said, "At least I escaped with half my face as well as my life. When the fighting started, I was one of those who tried to stop it. I was very young then, and I thought the world was, how you say, run on the level? In those days I still believed in rational discussion, in peaceful demonstration, *hein?* I mean, our

modest demands were just and there was no reason for sensible men to oppose us. I tried to persuade my friends and the police to talk, to compromise . . ."

He pointed to his ruined face to add, "This was how the police replied, in the gutter language of the rifle butt."

"I can see how a thing like that would make one bitter, but—"

"Bitter, madame? I am not bitter. I am *pleased* they made me listen to the voice of jungle reason, madame. It made me realize there can be no compromise between those who have and those who have not. I know the language of those who speak with guns and prisons against those who would fight for the rights of the oppressed. They spoiled my looks, but they taught me to hate, and hate is now our weapon. Hate and an eye for an eye. Force against force. Murder against murder. Terrorism against those who terrorize the little people of this world!"

Number One snicked the safety off on his machine pistol as he added, "I will have your cooperation, madame. Even if I have to take your children from you, first one and then the other, and let you hear the sounds of their dying against the wall, outside!"

Ellen sobbed, "No, please, I'll do anything! Anything you say!"

Mollified, Number One lowered the gun muzzle and explained, "Ours is a bitter struggle, madame. A matter of life and death. My dream of equality for all mankind."

"I'm only asking proper food and blankets, monsieur."

But Number One wasn't listening, or perhaps he hadn't heard. A man with a dream has little time for idle chatter. What was the comfort, or even the lives, of a few women and children to a man who was out to save humanity? Had it been Lenin or Trotsky who'd once said, "To make an omelette, one must break a few eggs"?

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The study at the Bracken villa was crowded as Lieutenant Sophos fussed with the tape recorder, muttering something about cheap cassettes. It was getting dark outside and Captain Nikolidis was a dark silhouette against the last rays of sunset streaming through the window behind him. Jim McCabe flicked on the light switch by the door without waiting to ask permission. Jonas Bracken shot him an annoyed look but said nothing. When he'd told his wife's first husband to make himself at home, he hadn't expected to be taken up on it so completely. He knew the jerk had a certain right to be in on the ransom exchange, and the captain seemed to want McCabe where he could keep an eye on him, but, damn it, this Noel Coward horseshit was above and beyond common decency. He didn't *like* the son of a bitch.

From his place by the window, Nikolidis asked Bracken, "Have you a list of the serial numbers on those large bills your secretary is putting together, Mr. Bracken?"

Bracken said, "Of course. You don't get them until Ellen and the children have been returned, though. I don't care what happens to those scumbags once my family is safe, but I'll not have anyone sabotaging the exchange I've agreed to!"

Sophos said, "I have the tape they sent ready to go," and the others stopped talking as young Sophos threw the switch.

Ellen Bracken's voice was reedy but recognizable as she said, "Jonas . . . Your message that you've raised

the money is taken as a sign of good faith. Our . . . our executions have been postponed . . . "

Bracken muttered, "What does she mean, postponed? Damm it, I raised the money and used the radio to tell them I was willing to pay!"

Sophos shot him a warning look and he fell silent as Ellen's voice continued, "At twenty-hundred hours, eight o'clock this evening, you will be contacted on the two-way radio they left for you. That is all for now. . . . Jonas, I love you!"

There was a sudden slapping sound, a metallic hiss, then nothing. Young Lieutenant Sophos shrugged and said, "That is all. The rest of the tape seems to be blank."

Bracken's face was ashen as he said, "What more can they want? I can't raise another dime! Don't they know how much twenty-five million *is?* For God's sake, we've got a *steamer trunk* full of money for the bastards!"

McCabe said, "Why settle for twenty-five when you can ask the chump for fifty? They're going to keep upping the ante on you, Bracken. Haven't you figured that out by now?"

"Oh, shut up, you wise-ass son of a bitch! What have *you* offered to put up, aside from your big mouth?"

Captain Nikolidis soothed, "Gentlemen, I assure you everything is going well for us, despite the childish cat-and-mouse game these mad anarchist are indulging themselves in."

Bracken looked blank and Nikolidis explained, "By now, a professional criminal would have tried to pick up the money and been on his way. As any sane man knows, twenty-five million dollars is more than enough for even a greedy band of desperados. This distressing person calling himself Number One is playing into our hands with his petty sadism."

Nikolidis turned to his lieutenant and asked. "Tell me, Dimitrios, what is the possible range of that cheap two-way radio they left for Mr. Bracken to contact them with?"

Sophos shrugged and said, "Fifteen kilometers, maybe twenty, sir."

The captain nodded and said, "That's what I thought. They are not so clever after all. When they call at eight, we will know at least one of them must be within twenty kilometers of this villa."

Bracken hadn't caught on yet, but McCabe said, "Gotcha. You're talking about radio triangulation! Do you have the gear to zero in on the location of their transmitter, Captain?"

"No, but the army does. Dimitrios, you'd better get moving. Riot police teams and at least two mobile radio directional finders. I'll use my own radio cruiser as a mobile command post, once the kidnappers begin transmitting. Are there any questions?"

Lieutenant Sophos shook his head and answered, "No, my captain," as he headed for the door.

Nikolidis glanced at his watch and said, "We have a little over an hour to wait. I suggest we all grab a bite to eat."

Bracken said, "Just a minute. I intend to bargain in good faith with these people, Captain. I won't have you interfering until Ellen and the children are safe."

Nikolidis didn't answer, but McCabe snorted, "Wise up, chump! There's nothing you can do to stop it, now that the fuzz have a handle on the gang. Besides, the guys we're dealing with are off the wall. If they doublecross you, Ellen's only hope may be these cops' nailing at least one member of the gang."

"I don't like it. What if something goes wrong?"

"It's already gone wrong, you clown! Ellen and the kids are being held by a bunch of dingalings! Offer them the ransom. Offer them any goddam thing they want, but let the captain here find out where Ellen and the kids are being held!"

Bracken ran a hand over the stubble on his chin and sighed, "I guess I have no choice, do I?"

Nikolidis nodded and said, "That is right, my friend, you don't."

Radio triangulation is not as complicated as it sounds. Anyone who's ever swung a portable radio on its base to bring in a stronger signal has mastered the basic moves. The small antenna built into a transistor radio picks up more energy when its coil is broadside to the station transmitting it. Build a larger coil antenna, the size and general shape of a basketball hoop, attach it vertically on a pivot, connect it to a delicately tuned set of radio earphones, and you're in business. When the signal sounds as loud in each ear, you have your loop pointed dead at the transmitter. Keep the sound balanced, and even in a moving vehicle you can pinpoint the direction the signal is coming from.

With one loop, the pilot of a lost plane can home in on a radio beacon, merely keeping the coded dit-dots at the same volume in each earphone as he "rides the beam" toward the source of the signal he's tuned to. Lieutenant Sophos, in his radio van, couldn't simply head directly for the WARA transmission, if and when he picked it up. A land vehicle has to follow streets and roadways. It obviously can't beeline through buildings and walls. But that was where triangulation came in.

The army-police team had more than one radio van patrolling the suburban roads around the Bracken villa that evening. They had seven, and each van, as well as Captain Nikolidis and a brace of army choppers hovering in the darkening sky, carried a large-scale grid map of the area. The radio vans deliberately kept themselves

spaced out a few miles apart as they waited for Number One to broadcast his further demands. Each operator would take a bearing from his own position and run a pencil line across his map toward the direction his own loop read the strongest signal from. All members of the team were in radio contact on their own short-wave frequency, and as each line was drawn, it would be duplicated on every map. When two or more lines crossed, they'd have the terrorists' transmitter pinned down within a few yards.

In the study of his villa, Jonas Bracken waited tensely as he watched the electric clock, newly nailed to his expensively papered wall. The dial read 7:58 and the red second hand crept through gluelike time with agonizing slowness as Jonas hovered over the radio the terrorists had left in Ellen's room. A Greek technician had wired it into a loud speaker and attached a voice-print recorder. Henry Orkin stood by, but as the zero hour approached, Captain Nikolidis had gone out to his own radio cruiser. Jim McCabe had insisted on going along, and Bracken was grateful to have the loudmouth off his back. WARA had warned he was to be alone when he received their next message, and you never knew when McCabe was going to offer one of his sardonic comments in that rasping wise-ass voice of his.

The buzzer on Bracken's Swiss watch suddenly sounded and he shot a look at the wall clock as the other officers and technicians in the silent room started at the slight sound. Bracken grimaced and said, "That wall clock's slow!" as the technician monitoring the radio snapped a warning finger, and the loudspeaker blared, "WARA calling Jonas Bracken. Come in, Bracken. Over."

Jonas bent over the tiny two-way set and said, "This is Bracken. Let me speak to my wife. Over."

"She is not at this forward observation post. Over."

"Is she all right? Over."

"You must learn to accept my word, if you expect me to accept yours, Mr. Bracken. We have sent you some photographs in the mail."

One of the voice-print men whispered into a second microphone, and out in the captain's car, the officer

next to the driver muttered, "It's Number One himself, sir!"

In the back seat, Nikolidis grinned like a boy at McCabe and said, "Better than I hoped for! Turn up the conversation between WARA and the house. Then contact Sophos on the other wavelength and see how he's doing!"

The interior of the car was filled with Bracken's worried voice as he said, "I've done everything you demanded. You asked for a lot of money, but I've managed to raise it. How do you want me to get it to you? Over."

Nikolidis muttered, "*Stall,* damm it! We need time to pinpoint the maniac's location!"

Number One's voice was saying, "We are not thieves, Bracken. We do not hold hostages for mere money. An imperialist pig like you would not be expected to understand, but money is of no use, in itself, to our cause!"

McCabe chortled, "Bracken doesn't have to stall! The longwinded dingaling is on an ego trip. He's getting his rocks off making Jonas squirm while he plays little tin god!"

Number One's voice continued, "WARA is a military force. A military force needs arms, munitions, and supplies. Do you read me? Over."

"What is it? What do you want? I'll do anything you say! Over."

"You have exactly one week to fill our order list, using the money you were able to raise. Let me explain the alternative. If you have not succeeded by the end of exactly one week, we shall execute your wife and children, starting with Susan, on the seventh day!"

The radioman in the front seat turned and whispered, "Sophos has a bearing, sir! Azimuth 224 from his location to our southeast!"

"Log it and see if anyone else has a bearing. I want to hear what the idiots are demanding now."

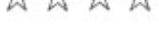
The voice of Number One was saying, "One F-4-E Phantom jet. One C-141 Starlifter cargo carrier. We'll also need missiles for the phantom jet. One dozen sidewinders and another dozen Sparrow-3s . . ."

Brackn cut in to sputter, "That's preposterous! How am I suppose to buy military hardware? Over!"

Number One sneered, "How does everyone else buy it, you fool? We know the United States is the arms supplier to the capitalist world. Your precious Uncle Sam seems willing enough to sell tanks and jets to anyone who wants them. Didn't the last war between India and Pakistan settle the fact that the American Patton tank was superior to the American Sherman? If they can arm both the Arabs and Israelis, I imagine they can arm us, if you put up the money!'

The radio man in Nikolidis' cruiser handed a clipboard back and said, "Menderes has a second bearing, sir! North northeast, within eight kilometers!"

"I think I have it," nodded the captain, staring at the two lines on his map as he added, "An old sports arena, ruined in the civil strife right after the German occupation. *Skata!* What are you waiting for? Let's *move in!*"



Dimitrios Sophos was first on the scene, moving cautiously up the winding hillside road to the ruined arena in his blacked-out van. The voice of Number One was loud in his earphones now as the WARA leader droned on: "Ten M-2 .50-caliber machine guns, with ten thousand rounds of ammunition for same. We want forty M-16 automatic rifles, with forty thousand rounds in banana clips. Then we'll need forty M-1911 U.S. Army .45-caliber pistols and four hundred rounds of .45 hollow-point, four hundred rounds .45 wadcutter, four hundred . . ."

"I got it. It's a heavy platoon," said McCabe, in the captain's car.

Nikolidis shushed him and said, "I can count. WARA has about forty members, and two, at least, are pilots." He leaned forward to ask his driver, "Can you see the van of Lieutenant Sophos?"

The driver took a turn on two wheels, tires squealing on the mountain road, as he answered, "No, my captain, but this road leads nowhere but the ruined stadium. The lieutenant is somewhere just ahead of us."

As they were speaking of him, Sophos ordered his own driver to stop as he peered across the vacant parking lot of the stadium at the twisted beams against the starlit sky. His driver whispered, "I see a vehicle, over there by the old ticket booths, my lieutenant! It looks like a furniture truck!"

Sophos adjusted his loop antenna as Number One's voice continued: "Three M-203 grenade launchers and ten cases of rifle grenades. We also demand ten cases of fragmentation hand grenades. We prefer the German potato masher, but we'll accept U.S. or British issue."

Switching to the police band, Sophos murmured, "Captain Nikolidis, I have them. They are broadcasting from a furniture van in the stadium parking lot. Over."

McCabe frowned and asked, "What are they doing? Handing themselves to us on a silver platter?"

Nikolidis ignored him to ask his junior officer, "Is there any way out of there for them, Dimitrios? Over."

"Negative, sir. The old stadium sits in a natural amphitheater in the hills. If we hit it with floodlights before we move in, anyone trying to climb the limestone cliffs behind the place will be outlined like a fly on a plaster wall. My men and I have the only exit road blocked, and the idiot is still transmitting. He hasn't spotted us yet! Over."

"Hold your position until the rest of us move in. All units, converge on map coordinate 46-Epsilon. I intend to park just down the road behind Lieutenant Sophos with tail lights on and headlamps off. We shall need floodlights and loud speakers, so . . . As you were.

Sophos has a bullhorn and our swivel lamps will do. Are there any questions? Over."

There were none from the Greek police or military, but Jim McCabe said, "I've got a question! What in the fuck do you guys think you're doing?"

Niklodis snapped, "We're going to catch this Number One, of course!"

"What about Ellen Bracken and the kids? You don't think WARA's holding all three of them in that van up ahead, do you?"

"Perhaps not, but once we have their leader—"

"How do you know the Frenchman's their leader? How do you know we're not being suckered all the way? That bunch of dikes who called themselves the Symbionese something-or-other had a tame black stooge fronting for them as a so-called field marshal. After the police swatted the poor jerk, it turned out he was only a functional illiterate on an ego trip. Nobody's ever quite figured out who really gave the orders."

"All right, what if this should be true? If I can get my hands on any one of the members of WARA, I'll force him to tell me the identities of the others and—"

"They'll scatter to the four winds the minute your guys have the drop on those clowns in the furniture van, damn it! They'll waste Ellen and the kids and split the minute Number One goes down!"

"Greece is not a large country, and we know most of the band are foreigners. They may, as you suggest, try to scatter. Hopefully, they will try to make it out of the country, but, with our customs officials in possession of their names—"

"Look, I'm not saying you won't pick them up, in time. But what about the hostages? What good will it do Ellen and her kids—one of 'em's *my* kid—if you shoot-em-up cowboys round the gang up after the three of them are dead?"

Nikolidis didn't answer.

Jim McCabe hadn't expected him to.

He said very softly, "If anything happens to my son, or even his mother or half-sister, I'm going to take it very personally, Nikolidis."

"Skata! Are you threatening me, Mr. McCabe?"
"No, I'm just telling it like it is, old buddy!"

By this time the terrorists' demands had far exceeded the purchasing power of the twenty-five million Jonas Bracken had scraped together, but when the worried father tried to tell them that, Number One snapped, "You will purchase every item we demand. If it takes more than twenty-five million, that's *your* problem!"

Meanwhile, heavily armed Greek police and soldiers had fanned out from their hidden vehicles to surround the hillside stadium, awaiting only Captain Nikolidis' final command before they moved in for the showdown. Lieutenant Sophos, wearing a flak jacket and carrying a walkie-talkie as well as his machine pistol, had eased as close as he dared to the furniture truck the radio signals were coming from. He crouched in the shadows of a maquis clump, within charging distance of the truck, as he murmured into his walkie-talkie, "There is a light in the rear of the vehicle, my captain. I see a wire running up to the steelwork of the ruined stadium. It must be their transmitting antenna."

Back at his own position, behind the hood of his parked cruiser, the captain asked, "Are there no lookouts posted, Dimitrios? What about the ruined grandstands, above your position?"

"I don't see any, sir. At any rate, we know their Number One is speaking from inside the vehicle. I await your order, my captain."

"The others are in position. Are you ready for the lights?

Sophos took the bullhorn from the officer nearest him and answered, 'Yes, sir. Please ask the sharpshooters to watch the stands."

Then, as a dozen police searchlights winked on, bathing the furniture truck and its surroundings in chalk-white illumination, the lieutenant raised the bullhorn to his lips and called out, "Attention! Attention in the furniture truck! You are completely surrounded. You have exactly thirty seconds to throw out your weapons and come out with your hands above your heads!"

Crouching near Nikolidis, Jim McCabe gasped, "Are you nuts? We have to take the mother alive or it's curtains for Ellen and the kids!"

Nikolidis said, "Be still. We know what we are doing."

Young Dimitrios called out, "One . . . two . . . three . . . " as he broke cover and started moving in.

Nikolidis gasped, "No!" as he saw his junior officer exposing himself, brightly outlined in the searchlight glare.

McCabe muttered, "The jerk's too eager" as he joined the captain's crew in moving up toward the target. Lieutenant Sophos was running for the vehicle now, still counting down on his bullhorn as he closed in.

Nikolidis called out, "Dimitrios! Don't do it! Get back!" as the younger officer closed the gap, counting, "Twenty-seven . . . Twenty-eight . . . Twenty-nine . . . This is *it!*"

Sophos dropped his bullhorn and reached for the door handle with his free hand as Nikolidis and McCabe ran toward him, they too now exposed to fire from the truck or the stands behind it.

Nobody fired. The night was rent by a tremendous roar as the stolen vehicle, and Lieutenant Sophos, vanished in a searing fireball of high explosives, wired to the door he'd made the fatal mistake of touching.

McCabe threw himself sideways, knocking Nikolidis down with him, as the shock wave and flying debris whipped through the spaces their heads had just been occupying. The men who had followed Dimitrios up the hill were tossed like rag dolls by the first blast. A second, smaller blast followed as the fuel tank of the booby-

trapped vehicle exploded, spattering gobs of flaming liquid and white-hot metal in every direction. The captain struggled to rise as McCabe grabbed his arm and hissed, "Keep your ass down, damm it!" and a nearby police vehicle burst into flames.

When it was safe to raise their heads, the scene resembled a napalmed crossroads. Burned bodies and burning vehicles surrounded them in a glittering field of flame-lit glass shards. A lone searchlight, tilted at a crazy angle by the blasts, illuminated the mushroom cloud of oily black smoke rising high above the stadium. Somewhere in the night a helicopter's blades drummed away in the distance and Nikolidis muttered, "They should be landing. Don't they see what's happened here?"

McCabe felt himself for cuts or broken bones as he spit out a spoonful of dust and growled, "That's not a police chopper, you chump. Didn't I tell you they had at least two pilots in their gang?"

"*Skata!* Do you think they were broadcasting from an overhead helicopter all this time?"

McCabe got to his feet, saying, "It hardly matters. They may have had a wire running to that booby-trapped rig from the hills above, or they may have had a booster relay in it, broadcasting on one band while it picked up weaker signals on another frequency. Either way, they made a sap out of you. They expected you to zero in on that rig and had it wired for sound ahead of time!"

Nikolidis walked over to stare down at the smoldering form of Lieutenant Sophos. He made the sign of the cross and mumbled through bruised lips, "Dimitrios was like a son to me. What am I to tell his family? What am I to tell the families of all these other men those treacherous fiends killed or wounded?"

McCabe shrugged and answered, "You might start by admitting you don't know what you're up against. You think these WARA cats are a bunch of fuzzy-headed amateurs. Number One's no student radical. He's a cold-blooded professional killer!"

"The man is utterly mad!"

"That, too. It's going to take another crazy pro to *nail* the mother!"

Later that night, in Jonas Bracken's study at the villa, Jim McCabe was beginning to feel more human as he worked on some very fine Scotch and one of Bracken's expensive Havana Perfectos. His pants were torn and a skinned knee smarted when the weary McCabe thought about it, but he was thinking hard about more important matters.

Bracken was pacing back and forth nervously as Henry Orkin read into the phone from the WARA shopping list. Nikolidis looked up from his position on a window seat and frowned as Orkin mentioned hollowpoint pistol ammunition. He asked Bracken, "Have you any idea what a .45 hollowpoint will do to human flesh, Mr. Bracken?"

Bracken nodded bleakly and answered, "That's not my problem. I'm not as concerned about what WARA may do with the weapons they demand as I am about my family. Besides, as you saw this evening, WARA hardly needs *my* help in killing people!"

Nikolidis snapped, "My responsibility is not only to you and your family, sir! I am well aware of what a family means. Lieutenant Sophos was my nephew!"

"I'm sorry, Captain, I didn't know."

"It doesn't matter. Everyone these murderous anarchists kill will have a family somewhere. If Number One gets his hands on all those weapons, we will not be talking about the deaths of one woman and two children. We will be faced with the death of hundreds, even thousands! You

may not feel responsible for all those innocent lives, but I am forced to."

Before Bracken could reply, the door opened and a messenger from the downtown offices of Bracken Enterprises came in with a mail pouch. He took out a large bundle of mail, fastened with a thick rubber band, and placed it on the desk near Henry Orkin, who merely nodded and went on murmuring into the phone. As the messenger left, the efficient secretary picked up a pair of scissors with his free hand and snipped the band to go through the mail as he continued ordering supplies from the international arms merchant on the other end of the line.

One envelope was of brown manila paper, and Orkin blinked as he read the newsprint letters pasted on below the address. He turned to Bracken and waved it until Jonas came over and took it from his hand. Bracken stared down and read, "TO ENCOURAGE A PIG!" as, from the doorway, a Greek policeman told Nikolidis he was wanted on his car radio. The captain left the room just as Bracken opened the envelope and gasped.

McCabe asked, "What is it?"

Bracken started for the door, saying, "A letter and some pictures of Ellen and the children. I have to give these to the captain right away!"

McCabe grabbed his elbow and spun him around, hissing, "Are you nuts, too? You want Nikolidis and these bush-league fuzz charging in like a bunch of Keystone Cops until they get the three of them killed?"

"Dammit, Jim, I have to tell him about this. He's browned off enough at my submitting to the terrorists' demands!"

McCabe turned to Orkin and asked, "Do you have any way for me to make a copy of these snapshots, Hank?"

Orkin put a hand over his receiver and nodded, saying, "I've a full-color photocopier in my own office, down the hall. We use them to copy documents and—"

"Gotcha. Gimme the pictures, Jonas. I'll run down the hall and lift a set for my own files. You guys stay here and keep filling the WARA shopping list like good little boys."

Bracken didn't resist as McCabe took the pictures from his hand, but he stammered, "What do you want them for? What crazy scheme do you have in mind now?"

"I don't have anything in mind, not until I figure out where the scumbags are holding the three of them!"

Protesting feebly, Bracken followed McCabe to Orkin's office and watched with a worried frown as McCabe copied the prints on the four-color Zerox. As he ran each one through, McCabe handed the originals to Bracken. Bracken stared at his wife and children, who seemed to be in some sort of dungeon. He said, "There's a wire-mesh fence of some kind behind them."

McCabe said, "Screw the fence. Look at the wall behind them. We're lucky these were shot in color. I think the terrorists missed the murals on the wall during the split-second the flashbulb lit them up. Color photography brings out reds and blues brighter than they really look, too. I doubt if those faded frescoes are very noticeable in dull lighting."

Bracken studied the pictures in his hands, looking past Ellen's frightened face and the brighter wire mesh behind her to the faintly visible religious murals in the background. He nodded and said, "It looks like they're still in Greece, at any rate. I'm sure those murals are medieval Geek. You see those dim letters, near the head of some saint? They read, let me see . . . H . . . P . . . backwards N . . . "

"It's St. Irene, in Greek lettering," McCabe cut in, adding, "Are you still good for that hundred thou you offered as a reward for Ellen's return, old buddy?"

"What? Of course I am! Am I to understand you'd actually expect a reward for helping us find your own son?"

McCabe's face was unreadable as he tucked a couple of the copies he'd made away, growling, "Why go to strangers when you can keep the business in the family?"

Bracken shook his head and marveled, "You really are a son of a bitch, aren't you?"

McCabe headed for the door, answering, "That shouldn't come as such a big surprise. Hasn't Ellen told you so, in all these years?"

His voice was bitter as he added, "I'll bet she's told Jim Junior, too, huh?"

Bracken shook his head and said, "The boy doesn't know anything about you, Jim. The woman we both married happens to be a great lady, in case you forgot."

"Yeah, well, make sure you don't blow all your bread on buying off Number One. I'm billing you a hundred thou, once you get her back."

He paused in the doorway to add sardonically, "The kids will be on the house."

Emil Wasserman had been run out of Ger-many in his youth for being a Jew. The Israeli government had run him out of Tel Aviv for being a counterfeiter, art forger, and occasional murderer. He was living on a yacht in Cannes Harbor with a Monégasque passport and a Danish blonde when Jim McCabe caught up with him.

McCabe anchored his seaplane near the Wasserman yacht and submitted to a polite but professional frisk as Wasserman's tight-lipped bodyguards ushered him over the side from the dock. The love-toy Wasserman kept aboard was sunning herself on deck in a string bikini, but the old counterfeiter was below, doctoring some documents for a sick friend in his shipboard lab. He hastily put the papers away as he greeted McCabe with a limp handshake and waved him to a nearby cabin bench. McCabe handed him the photocopies he'd made at the Bracken villa and said, "I'll stand. Look these over and tell me all about them."

Wasserman took the pictures with a puzzled frown. He was a small pale man who rather resembled the Pillsbury

Doughboy, slightly enlarged. He spread them on a drawing board and said, in his faint international accent, "This is your ex-wife, Ellen, and, my word, how Jimmy has grown, my friend."

"She's been feeding him Wheaties. What about those Greek murals in the background? Do you think you could get a handle on just where they might have been painted?"

Wasserman picked up a jewelers loup, screwed it into one eye, and said, "Cretan school. Early sixteenth century, and, yes, definitely painted by a master. See how much red he used? I'd say those murals were painted by Theophanos of Khanion. He was a talented monk who—"

"Screw what he was, Emil! I just want to know *where* he was when he splashed those warrior saints all over the walls!"

Wasserman shrugged and said, "Theophanos was very active in his later years. His fame had spread and he went from one church or monastery to another, painting very rapidly. I like the way he got around the usual stiffness of the Byzantine style, don't you?"

"Come on, Wasserman, you can do better than that!"

"Of course I can. Haven't I told you, often, that I am a genius? We, ah, haven't discussed terms, Jim."

"Look, you must know Ellen and the kids have been kidnapped. These pictures were sent to Jonas Bracken, along with a ransom demand you wouldn't believe! I'd like to lay some bread on you, but I'm strapped for working capital and—"

"I want ten thousand dollars. Your marker is good with me, and, if I know you, Bracken has offered more than that to get his wife back."

"Hey, come on, do you think I'd ask a payoff to rescue my own kid?"

"Please, Jim, we have known each other nearly twenty years."

"All right. Get me a handle on the place they're being held and I'll see what I can do. This famous artist of yours must have left a record of some sort behind him as he wandered around painting old churches. Don't they keep files on old masterpieces some damned place?"

Wasserman went over to a nearby bookcase and sighed,

"You have no idea how many masterpieces they have, moldering away in odd corners of this part of the world. You'd better sit down and pour yourself a drink, Jim. This is liable to take a while."

"You mind if I spend it with that zazie I saw up on deck?"

"You may help yourself to my cigars and brandy. Ingrid is my private stock."

"It never hurts to ask," laughed McCabe, going over to a sideboard to pour himself a snifter of brandy. Wasserman spread an art volume on his drawing table, muttering, "I admire a man with *chutspah,* but you are beyond belief! How is Jonas Bracken bearing up under all of this? I see, by her picture, your ex-wife is still a beautiful woman. You were an idiot to let her go, Jim."

"Bracken's all right, and I didn't let Ellen go. She went."

"You drove her away, you mean. How could any man betray a woman like that with those waterfront tramps you never could get enough of, Jim?"

"After you've been eating steak for a while, beans taste fine. Have you found anything in that effing book, or do you want to lecture me some more?"

"Be patient, Jim. I have more than a dozen volumes on Byzantine art. I can narrow it down a bit, since I'm assuming the place we want must be in Greece, at least."

"How do you figure that? I flew over here in half a day."

"Yes, and you had to present your passport to the harbormaster when you landed, *nicht?"*

"I see what you mean. The Iron Curtain starts just north of Greece and the Turks are sort of interested in anyone zooming in from Athens these days. Aren't there some Byzantine churches on the Italian coast?"

"Many. But you forget I am a genius. Theophanos never crossed the Adriatic. He spent some time in what is now Yugoslavia, but—"

"Gotcha! Ellen and the kids are in some Byzantine ruin, on the Greek mainland. Can we narrow it down a little?"

Wasserman took another volume down and started thumbing through it, as McCabe paced up and down the

cabin. Wasserman said, "Theophanos painted at Mount Athos, but the monastery is still occupied, and Ellen would not be allowed there. No women, in fact, would be allowed in any monastery. Not if it was still in use."

"What about a convent?"

"*Theophanos* wouldn't have been allowed in a convent, you idiot. Besides, the place has to be deserted. I can hardly see monks or nuns as part of a terrorist plot, and, hmmm, here is a list of religious institutions the master helped to decorate!"

He opened a drawer and took out a navigation chart for Greek waters, marking it with pencil as he muttered, "I am really too brilliant for my own good."

McCabe looked over Wasserman's shoulder as he asked, "They list murals on that Greek map?"

Wasserman snapped, "Of course not, but they do list ruins. Do you see that three-dot symbol, right here? That's the international sign for an archaeological site. Theophanos painted here, at Agia Tria, here, at Metamorphosis, and, ah, I like this one, Roussanou, at the edge of the Thessalian Plain!"

"You've got it down to three?"

"I may be able to do better," chortled Wasserman, going over for another art book. He screwed the jeweler's loup back in his eye, held the photocopy of Ellen and the captive children in one hand, and leafed through the book with the other until he yelled, "*Lieber Gott!* I am too much! You see those warrior saints in armor? You see the inscription to St. Irene of Byzantium? The monastery is deserted, but still consecrated. It is only opened on certain religious occasions. At this time of the year, nobody would have any reason to go there."

Wasserman drew a small circle around the dots marked "Roussanou" and said, "That's where they have Ellen and the children, Jim. It's a good hideout. High on a limestone peak, approachable by one narrow dirt road winding up from the plain below."

McCabe stabbed a finger down on a contour line and read, "Eighteen hundred meters. That's pretty high."

"The monks who built it were a bit paranoid. They wanted to protect themselves from the outside world, and

the invaders who overran Greece all through the Dark Ages. Your terrorists chose well. The monastery is built into a natural fortress of rock pinnacles. There's no way to approach without them spotting you well in advance. They'd be able to kill the hostages long before anyone was halfway up and—"

"What about an airborne assault? They must have some flat ground up on top of that mountain."

"Not enough to matter. The top's not completely flat, and the buildings occupy most of the space. They'd hear a helicopter, and the wind up there among those peaks would make a parachute assault sheer suicide. I think you'd better let Jonas Bracken pay, and hope the terrorists are reasonable."

McCabe shook his head and said, "If there's one thing I'm sure of, it's that those guys up there are certified nuts! They'll waste Ellen and the kids as soon as they take delivery of the ransom. They're only keeping them alive to string Jonas along."

Wasserman looked regretfully at Ellen's picture and asked softly, "What are you going to do, Jim?"

McCabe said, "That's a good question."

McCabe returned to Greece that afternoon and flew, at high altitude, over the Monastery of Roussanou. He made a single pass. The gleam of sunlight he spotted from among the crumbling ruins on the rock chimney might have been from a shard of broken glass, or

from the lenses of a pair of field glasses. He flew on toward Athens, having seen as much as he wanted. If anyone was holding Ellen and the kids down there, they'd picked one hell of a hairy spot. The limestone cliffs on all sides rose nearly sheer from the red clay of the plain below. The chimney of Mount Roussanou was only one of several steep buttes carved out of the eroded larger massif to the north. A rescue party could come in from the north, over the tree-covered plateau that rose to the level of the isolated peaks, but the chimney the monastery occupied was well over two miles from the nearest approachable high ground. The whole complex rather resembled one-half of the Grand Canyon, done in chalk. The updrafts whipping up those dirty-white cliffs from the sun-baked plain figured to be a bitch, too. A parachute landing on one of those red tile roofs figured to be instant hamburger.

He flew on to Athens, landed at Piraeus Harbor, and rented a station wagon. Then, using a borrowed road map, he retraced his route to the plateau north of the monastery.

He followed a dirt road along the top until he thought he might be pushing his luck, and then he got out to cut through the scrubby woods on foot. The afternoon sun was low, but the light was still good when he carefully worked his way to the edge of the cliffs. He stared across the yawning gulf to the distant peak the monastery occupied, and from the cover of a windswept pine he studied the complex of ruins with the high-powered binoculars he'd brought along. He was careful not to let the sun shine on his lenses as he scanned the ruins. The distant walls leaped closer through the binoculars as he swept them along the top of Mount Roussanou. The place seemed deserted. Then a door in the rear of a small building opened and McCabe muttered, "Bingo!"

The man on the distant chimney was wearing a black quasi-uniform and carried a machine pistol. Unless the monks of Roussanou were very paranoid indeed, he'd found the hideout.

McCabe sensed movement from above and flinched as a shadow passed over his own hiding place. He lowered the binoculars and reached for his shoulder holster, glancing up anxiously.

It was only a vulture, taking advantage of the evening thermals to ride the rising drafts along the cliff face on motionless wings.

McCabe muttered, "Lazy bastard," as he idly watched the big bird's effortless soaring flight to the east. The warm setting sunlight flashed redly on its pinions as it banked casually to circle back for another investigation of the ground, far below. Whatever the vulture's sharp eyes had picked up, down at the base of the cliffs, it hadn't been worth dropping down to eat. The vulture flew past McCabe again, caught an updraft, and circled far out over the gulf to wheel lazily across the sky. It hadn't flapped its huge wings once, as McCabe watched.

He shrugged. Looking across at where Ellen and the children were being held prisoner, he muttered, "If I had the wings of an angel, over these prison walls I would fly . . . "

Then he snapped his fingers and said, "That's it!"

As he made his way back to the car in the gathering dusk, the quiet voice of common sense whispered, "You know you've got to be out of your mind!" But McCabe didn't listen. You only get to go around once, and common sense can slow a knockaround guy down.

The Sky Riders were a barnstorming band of expatriates in their twenties, organized by Ben Miller, a Californian who'd graduated from surfing off Malibu to jumping off cliffs with a Rogallo wing on his back. His

main momma, Della, had followed him to Europe when he started looking for new scenery to fly over. The other five had been gathered along the way. The clique was held together by a mutual love of travel, hang-gliding, and eating. The air shows they put on paid poorly, but at least, as Ben observed, it sure beat working.

Jim McCabe caught up with them just down the coast from Athens. The Sky Riders were featured as part of a summer fair. The money offered sucked, but at least the fair promoters had erected a high rickety diving platform for them to take off from and the sea breeze was steady through most of the hot afternoon. As Jim McCabe made his way through the crowd of rubbernecking tourists, shouting fairground peddlers, and stone-eyed whores, the P.A. system kept yelling at him to look at Joe Thomas for some reason. McCabe finally gathered that Joe Thomas was the guy zooming around over his head with a polka-dot hang-glider. Thomas was hanging by his knees from the control bar in a clown costume. He was trailing colored smoke and honking an airhorn at the crowd below. A lot of them were laughing, so McCabe assumed it was supposed to be funny. The idea of hanging upside down at that altitude without a parachute made McCabe slightly ill.

By the time McCabe had elbowed through to the cleared grassy landing strip, Joe Thomas was coming in for a touchdown. Another figure in a clown suit was sprawled out on the grass, pretending to be asleep. The clown hanging from the polka-dot Rogallo honked his horn desperately, and it seemed obvious he was coming down right on top of the sleeper. The crowd bought it and sucked in its connective breath as the dart-shaped hang-glider seemed about to deposit its rider's heels right in the victim's midriff.

Then, at the last possible moment, the pointed nose rose and the polka-dot kite zoomed up into a stall, just beyond the "sleeper." This time McCabe sucked in his breath, expecting the dangerously low stall to hammerhead the kite and rider down with a leg-breaking slam. As a pilot, he knew how much diving room you needed to recover from a hammerhead stall, but, as he waited for the inevit-

able crash, nothing happened. The crazy hang-glider just hung there, with its nose in the air, and slowly settled to earth. McCabe muttered, "What the hell?" even as he realized a hang-glider could function in a pinch as a parachute.

The polka-dot kite deposited its rider safely on the grass as the so-called sleeper suddenly jumped up to help him out of his harness. They released a crossbar, allowing the Rogallo wing to collapse like a folding umbrella, then came over to pass the hat along the front line of the crowd. McCabe stepped back between two fat Greek ladies as the P.A. announced, "Watch beautiful Cora! Is she not the butterfly?"

McCabe looked up in time to see a statuesque girl in black lace panties and bra catch a thermal and circle up in the sun, hanging by one arm. She sideslipped out of the updraft and slowly floated down, reaching behind her to unfasten her bra as, in the distance, a band played "The Strip Tease Polka."

The announcer yelled, "No, Cora! Not in front of all these children!" as the girl flying the hang-glider threw her oversized brassiere down to the crowd. One of the Greek ladies gasped in horror, and McCabe judged that the Sky Riders seemed to be going a bit far, with a Mediterranean audience.

Then Cora proceeded to remove her panties.

She circled down waving the black lace wickedly, to mixed reviews. The men and boys in the crowd roared with delight, as their womenfolk screamed indignantly. McCabe muttered, "Jesus, doesn't she know they still stone whores in the back country of Greece?" as the big athletic girl came in for a daisy-cutting pass across the grass, apparently stark naked.

Then he saw she was wearing a pink body stocking. As others in the crowd caught on, the roar of shock and indignation were replaced by rustic laughter. The Greek peasant is a bit puritanical, but he or she enjoys a good joke as much as anyone.

A trio of young toughs broke through to run after the buxom Cora for a possibly friendly feel. The big girl laughed, shoved forward on her control bar, and easily

zoomed up and out of reach. McCabe was struck once again by the incredible maneuverability of the crazy-looking kites.

Cora landed somewhere out of sight as the crowd switched its attention to yet another Sky Rider. The announcer called him the Amazing Rudolph, but he was dressed like Captain Marvel or one of those other tight-underwear comic-book heros. His glider was trailing red, white, and blue smoke as he circled, waiting for something. McCabe saw a line of big balloons slowly rising and realized they were four-foot surplus weather balloons, tethered on strings. As the last one bobbed into line, Rudolph dropped the nose of his kite and came down like an angry falcon, the sunlight gleaming on the wicked knife blade attached like a bayonet to the noseplate of his glider.

Pulling out like a Stuka dive bomber, Rudolph flew along the line of balloons, popping them like a string of firecrackers. They'd had a little white flour pumped in with their gas, so they appeared to be exploding bombs as Rudolph demolished them. It was very good theater, and once again, damned fine flying.

McCabe turned at the sound of a revved-up motorcycle engine, just as the announcer shouted, "And here comes Malibu Martin, the black Evil Knievel!"

Then a muscular black youth tore up a nearby ramp on a Honda with a Rogallo wing strapped to his back. He reached the end of the ramp a good fifty feet above the ground and zoomed out into space at a steep angle. The weight of the motorbike kept him from doing anything too spectacular on the way down, but he got down all right. McCabe hadn't realized how much weight one of those kites could carry. He made a quick calculation and figured the wing area had to run about two hundred square feet. Not a hell of a lot, compared to a plane, but the things were so lightly built they had to be almost pure lift.

Almost as if they wanted to prove his point, the last two Sky Riders leaped from the tower hanging double on the same glider. McCabe saw it was the boy and girl he'd seen before on television. They were dressed in

leotards and seemed to be putting on an airborne trapeze act. The male member of the team lowered the girl on a trapeze, controlling the hang-glider and keeping them centered in the rising thermal from the center of the sun-baked field.

Okay—so a guy could do some pretty wild tricks with a hang-glider. That was all McCabe really needed to know.

He pushed through to the cleared strip, ignoring a uniformed guard who told him in Greek to step back. Acting like a man who belonged, McCabe caught up with the black youth, who was wheeling his Honda and folded Rogallo toward the jump tower. McCabe said, "I like the way those things fly. How long would it take me to learn the basics?"

Martin looked around, surprised to hear an American voice, then shrugged and answered, "Depends on how much hair you got on your chest. Ever done any flying?"

"Would you believe a Sabre Jet and three air-to-air kills?"

"I'd believe it, but that's one strike against you. Pilots make lousy hang-gliders. You better forget it, Pops."

McCabe fell in beside him, insisting, "Come on, a kite is a kite is a kite. I can see they handle a little different than a plane, but—"

"Hey, they handle a lot different, Pops. For instance; how do you raise the nose of your big scrap-iron plane?"

"Raise the nose? Pull back on the stick, of course."

"Yeah? Well, you raise the nose of a Rogallo wing by *pushing forward!* How does that grab you?"

"You mean the controls are reversed?"

"Right on. You pull back on the control bar to dive. You bank to the left by pushing to your right, and, oh yeah, you land by pulling into a stall, right above the runway. I bet they never taught you that at Colorado Springs, huh, Pops?"

"I went through Maxwell Field, a couple of wars ago. I flew solo ahead of most of my class, too. How long did it take *you* to solo one of these things?"

"I've been flying three years. Before that, I used to fall down and skin my hide a lot."

"You think I could learn in three days?"

"Three days? You must want to fly awful bad, Pops."

"I do. How much do you think it would cost me?"

"Hey, man, we're, like, busy with this circus thing, you dig?"

"Are you making a lot of money at it?"

"Shit, are you kidding? We're losing money on Cora's bras and all them balloons. This is a poor country, Pops."

"How does a hundred bucks a day sound, Martin?"

The black Sky Rider stopped pushing his gear and sighed, "It sounds cool, but you'll have to ask the main man."

"Okay. Where is he?"

Martin pointed up into the sky and said, "Up there. He'll be comin' down directly."

McCabe looked up in time to see the couple coming in for a landing. The girl was still dangling from the trapeze as the pilot flattened out their approach glide. She dropped lightly from the bar and cartwheeled across the grass to the applause of the crowd as the man at the control bar stalled his glider and floated down to land a few feet away. The girl ran over and helped him shuck out of the harness and collapse the big red kite, as Martin observed, "That's Ben Miller and his main momma, Della. Ben owns most of this gear and the two vans. So he calls the shots."

As the pair with the red hang-glider approached, a biplane started writing in smoke above the fair grounds and McCabe realized the Sky Riders had completed their show for the afternoon. A couple of the others, already changed into jeans and T-shirts, though still wearing clown makeup, came out on the runway to help Martin and Ben with their equipment. Martin handed the handlebars of his Honda to the one called Joe and, waving Ben and Della over, called out, "I got a live one, Ben! This dude says he's willing to lay some heavy bread on us for some flying time!"

Miller and the girl came over. McCabe extended a hand, but the honcho ignored it, saying, "We've got to move the show up the road, friend."

Martin cut in quietly, "He's talking about a hundred a day, Ben."

As Miller frowned thoughtfully, the one called Joe shoved his clown's hat under McCabe's nose and said, "Put up or shut up!"

McCabe nodded, took out his wallet, and peeled off a hundred dollars' worth of Greek bank notes, asking, "Am I on?"

The girl, a smaller version of the amazonian Cora, dimpled up at McCabe and said, "It's not as easy as we might make it look, mister."

"I'm Jim McCabe and I'll take my chances, honey. How about it, Ben? That kite of yours is rigged to carry double, isn't it?"

Martin added, "He says he's a pilot. A fighter pilot, yet."

Ben Miller shook his head and said, "I dunno. What's the wienie, Mr. McCabe? I mean, I'm not putting you down, but aren't you a little old to get into hang-gliding?"

"You want to go a couple of rounds and find out?"

"No, but I'd like to know what's the rush. I mean, there are schools for beginners in this sport, and they wouldn't charge you any hundred a day."

"So, I'm in a hurry, and I want a real pro to teach me."

"I've already got that figured. You haven't told me why."

McCabe dropped the money in Joe's clown hat, saying, "I'll tell you all about it, if and when I find out whether or not I *can* fly one of the damned things."

Back in the fifties, Jim McCabe had fought it out with Migs at sixty thousand feet. Since that time he'd

flown at every altitude between the stratosphere and under some bridges. Strapped in the cabin of a plane, McCabe felt immune to any fear of heights.

Standing on the edge of a cliff above a rock-strewn Aegean beach, was another matter. The wave-carved limestone cliff was probably less than five hundred feet high. Staring down at the dots below that represented the other Sky Riders, it seemed a lot higher.

Ben Miller was strapping him into what felt like a parachute harness as Martin and Joe held the flapping Rogallo canopy steady. The sea breeze was licking over the top of the cliff in a standing wave, and the hang-glider was bigger, and clumsier, at such intimate range.

As Miller tightened a buckle, McCabe licked his dry lips and asked, in a desperately casual voice, "What's the wing loading on this one? It looks bigger than the others."

Miller said, "It is. Most of our wings run to two hundred and fifteen square feet. This one, and the one Martin here uses to do the motorbike jump, run more like two-thirty. It's just a matter of slightly longer spars."

McCabe looked up at the three Duralumin tubes, coming to a point eight or ten feet out over the drop, and mused, "The keel's about twenty feet long, right?"

"Right. The wing tubes on either side are a little longer. Will you guys hold *on* to this rig? The sky's a little gusty today."

Even as Miller spoke, McCabe felt the crotch strap trying to lift his heels from the gritty surface, as the men on either side raised the corners behind him to spill the wind. He realized Miller had an almost condorlike sensitivity to the feel of moving air. Things were looking up. McCabe reached forward to steady the keel tube with the trapezelike control bar in front of him. He glanced up and saw the control-bar yoke came to a point at the junction of the keel and crossbar. It seemed solidly fixed in place, and he asked the others, "How do you *move* these controls?"

Miller said, "You don't. The control yoke goes up into a king post, above the center of gravity. The whole kite weighs less than forty-five pounds, and your harness straps, you'll notice, are attached to the same CG. As you

move the bar, you move the whole canopy. Meanwhile, your own weight just hangs there like a lump, so . . . "

"Gotcha. But, uh, aren't you coming along for the ride?"

Miller said, "Yeah," and crouched under the canopy beside McCabe to reach up with a snap ring on a canvas strap. McCabe saw the youth wore a lighter version of his own harness and said, "I get it. We dingle-dangle from the same CG like a couple of bananas. So when do we see if we're going to live through this insanity?"

Miller took the control bar in both hands and said, "Keep your hands loose on the bar until I tell you different. You guys set with the wing tubes?"

Martin and Joe shouted assent above the flapping of the canopy. Miller shouted, "Wind's up. On the count of three. One . . . two . . . And away we go!"

McCabe's stomach rose in his throat as his feet felt nothing under them and he realized the three young men, between them, had literally picked him up and thrown him off a cliff. The fact that one nut had gone along for the ride meant little as the two of them plunged down the sheer rock face, and then the flapping red canopy snapped taut, the fall slowed, and, wonder of wonders, they were airborne.

"Kee-rist!" laughed McCabe, glancing down at the dancing waves as Miller wheeled out over the sea and back toward the cliffs. Miller said, "Hang loose on that bar, damn it! I want to take us back to the updrafts along the wall. You lose altitude fast over water."

McCabe relaxed and enjoyed the sheer thrill of the ride, shouting, "Look, Ma, no hands! I'm a fucking seagull!"

The noseplate of the hang-glider approached the cliff face at a forty-five degree angle as Miller pulled in and to one side. They banked up into line with the coastal cliffs and rose above the level top of the escarpment as Miller played them into the long line of vertical air currents rising up the cliff faces. McCabe asked, "How long can you ride an updraft like this one?" and Miller said, "As long as you want. Some guy in Hawaii slid back and forth along the Kona Coast for over twelve hours one time.

He'd still be up there if he hadn't come down to take a piss."

He added, "Watch this!" and banked out to sea again, losing some altitude as he wheeled back the way they'd just come. Then he swung in close to the cliff, caught the standing wave again, and they were back in business, going the other way with the rim rocks below their heels.

McCabe said, "Let me try," and Miller relaxed his own pressure on the bar. McCabe saw they were losing speed and, thinking like an airplane pilot, eased the control bar forward. They started to sink as if on an elevator with a broken cable. Miller yelled, "Pull back, you jerk!" and McCabe did, overcoming all the training they'd pounded into him in the air force. Pulling back in a stall was just asking for a hammerhead, but this time the nose dropped and they started picking up speed.

He saw they were moving toward the cliffs and tried to bank seaward. The reversed controls swung them closer to the passing blur of jagged rocks, but then the stronger updraft near the cliffs caught the thin red Dacron and skyrocketed them up and over the flat top as Miller muttered dryly, "By George, I think he's got it!"

McCabe laughed like a schoolboy. Getting the feel of the control bar, he did a Lazy Eight along the edge of the dropoff. He tried for an Immelman, stalled out, and felt Miller's grip overriding his own as the experienced hang-glider shouted, "Let's not get carried away. You can't loop these things."

"I wasn't trying. How about a snap roll?"

"Negative. Your weight has to be under the canopy at all times. Guys *have* wound up inverted by a gust, but I don't recomend it."

"What happened?"

"Instant down. Canopy's not rigged for inverted flight. Couple guys been wasted that way. Della *told* you it wasn't as easy as it looks."

"Okay. Let me take over again. I promise not to do anything too frantic."

Miller shrugged and eased off, muttering, "Try not to wipe my ass with that cliff again, huh?" as McCabe tried another Lazy Eight and a Split S. By the time McCabe

had learned, the hard way, not to overcontrol, they were running out of sky. McCabe swung them toward the cliffs again, but Miller said, "We're too low to catch the updraft. You'd better let me show you how to land." He took a firmer grip as he added, "I assume you do intend to come *down,* someday?"

"I'm going to need a lot of practice on spot landings. Think you can teach me to touch down on, oh, a beach blanket?"

"For a hundred a day, I'll have you landing on a beer can. You're pretty good, for a beginner. I don't think you'll need three whole days before you solo."

"I'm going to solo this afternoon," said McCabe. "Then, if I'm still alive, I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse."

Ellen Bracken awoke with a start as water dripped on her cheek. She stared for a moment up into the dank stone groin of the gloomy cell, aware once more where she still was.

Susie's head was pillowed on her mother's shoulder. Ellen moved her own head and saw Jimmy scratching at the plaster with a stone chip. She asked him what he was doing, and Jimmy said, "Keeping a record of how long we've been in this place, Mom. It's been nearly a week and Dad hasn't come for us yet!"

"He will, dear. He has to shop for a lot of things these people want, before they'll let us go."

Susie opened her eyes and asked brightly, "Mommy, what's a week?"

Ellen patted her and said, "A week is seven days, honey."

"Can we go home when the week's all better?"

Ellen didn't answer, but Jimmy said, "You talk dopey. I'll bet Dad's coming on the seventh day. Don't you think so, Mom?"

"I'm sure he wants to, dear, but we have to be patient."

Susie sat up and announced, "I don't like it here. I want to go out and play. They don't have any toys or books or *anything* nice in this house. The food's all gluggy, too!"

On the other side of the wire-mesh screen, Number Six muttered and brushed at her tangled hair with one hand. She'd removed her knit mask and was sleeping on the cot with a rolled-up khaki jacket as a pillow. Her face was young but, when awake, hard and determined. In sleep, Number Six was quite an attractive girl. The peaceful expression on her cameo features made an odd contrast to the ugly muzzle of the oiled and polished carbine lying at her side, as if it were a lover.

Jimmy glanced over at her as she moaned in her sleep and whispered, "Who is that lady, Mom? Why is she so mad at us all the time?"

Ellen said, "I don't know, dear. I don't think she's been very happy lately."

Susie said, "She's yucky! Mean old yucky bad lady!"

Ellen shushed the children as she took advantage of the wan morning light to study the sleeping girl. Who *was* Number Six, she wondered, and what could have driven such an attractive girl into a desperate life like the one she obviously led?

Even without makeup, Number Six was beautiful, and the figure half-hidden by that quasi-uniform and clumsy boots was good enough to make most men turn for a second look. What could have turned her into such a hard dirty-faced and tangled-haired she-tramp? Her nails were bitten to the quick, and if she'd washed those grubby young hands in the last month, she hadn't used much soap.

Ellen touched two fingers to her own still-swollen lip, remembering how hard and brutal those hands of

the sleeping girl could be. The three of them were looking through the wire at Number Six now, and, as if by some wild-animal instinct the girl's eyes opened to meet Ellen's gaze with a startled, wolflike stare. The two women watched each other's eyes for a long moment. Then Number Six suddenly patted her carbine, as if to reassure herself it was still there, and sat up, asking, "What is it? What do you want?"

Ellen smiled and said, "When you were sleeping, just now, I couldn't see any signs of cruelty in your face. It hardly seemed possible you could be the same person who'd threatened to murder two innocent . . . Never mind."

Number Six ran fingers through her hair, swung her boots to the stone floor, and slid the carbine across her lap before she grumbled, "I'm a soldier. I do what I'm told."

Ellen sighed, "Really? Then that puts us all in the same boat, doesn't it?"

"What are you talking about?"

"About the four of us being prisoners here."

"You're crazy, lady! I'm not the prisoner! You and your two spoiled brats are the only prisoners of WARA. My comrades and I are here of our own free will!"

"You *chose* this life? A life that denies you normal feelings, or even, for God's sake, a *bath?*"

"Listen, you don't smell that wonderful yourself. We soldiers of WARA have no time for the petty luxuries of the Establishment. Our lives are meaningful in a way you'd never understand."

"But I want to understand, Number Six. By the way, do you have a name, or must we go on using that silly number?"

"My number is not silly. It's the only name I have or want now. The convent girl I used to be is dead. She died when I became committed to the Cause!"

"I see. Does your, ah, commitment leave room for things like love, a marriage, children of your own?"

"Perhaps, one day, after we have won our struggle."

"Then you do have normal instincts. Yet you threaten my children."

"It is necessary."

"My God, how I pity you!"

Number Six rose to her feet, holding the carbine in one hand and waving it like a baton as she sputtered, *"You* pity *me?* What do you know of life, you poor pampered toy? I could have settled for your kind of life. The soft parasitic life of a brainless slut who's only function is to serve as the receptacle for some rich man's semen!"

Ellen's tone was bantering as she answered, "Oh, you poor thing! Didn't anyone ever tell you women are capable of an orgasm, too?"

"Sex is not important to a soldier."

"My God, you people do have an unusual sort of army, don't you? Why don't you admit your real reasons? We both know you've allowed yourself to look and act like such a mess because you're *afraid* of sex. The thought of a man's arms around you scares you skinny!"

"That's a lie! My comrades respect me as a *person,* not a sex object! I have chosen true equality over the titters and gropings of lesser women. A woman is equal to any man when both are standing behind the gun breech!"

"Wouldn't they be even more equal lying dead with a bullet in each one's brain? You know that big gun of yours is a phallic symbol, don't you? What's the matter with Number One's sex life? Did those French police smash more than just his face?"

Number Six came over to the gate, muttering, "Why, you silly, nasty little cunt . . . " as Ellen drove another needle in, asking, "Are you going to play Butch and Femme again? You know what they say about ladies who like to smack other women around, don't you?"

Number Six blanched, turned, and went to the door. She opened it and yelled out to someone Ellen couldn't see, "Number Eight, get in here! I need a break, before I blow this stupid rich cunt's face off!"

She left without looking back. Her place was taken by a puzzled young man with a machine pistol and hastily donned ski mask. Number Eight put a foot upon the corner of the cot, slung the weapon over a shoulder, and asked, "What was that all about?"

Ellen Bracken's smile was triumphant as she answered,

"Nothing. Just a little girl talk. I wonder if you'd be kind enough to see about some breakfast for us."

The Sky Riders lived like gypsies in two vans and a trailer, hooked to an old pickup. In the past three days, Jim McCabe had gotten to know them a lot better, but they were still a bit dubious about him.

They were camped off the highway for the night, and when Ben Miller had told McCabe to take a walk, McCabe had known what the subject of their campfire meeting figured to be. He moved out of earshot and took a seat on a rock outcropping, lighting a cigarette and trying to spot an evening star to wish upon as the sun went down behind some olive trees to his right.

Ben finished laying out their new student's proposition, handing around the pictures of Ellen and the children as he said, "It's got to be unanimous, people. We know the part about the reward is true. Jonas Bracken's spread it all over the papers, and McCabe says he'll divvy even shares with us."

Martin sighed and said, "A hundred thou divided by seven is . . . Never mind, a lot of bread is a lot of bread, but how do we know we can *trust* this dude?"

Ben murmured, "Rudy?" and Rudolph Durler, a deceptively soft-spoken Swiss, said, "I have made some phone calls to, well, anti-Establishment friends. They say Jim McCabe is wild, tough, and a man of his word. He finances his airborne smuggling on credit. I do not think he would want to cheat us, and, in any case, he'd be up against four very angry men in very good physical condition!"

Cora Swensen said, "Four, my ass! I'll beat his brains out myself if he tries to get cute." She held up a picture and added, in a softer tone, "Besides, this poor old dame and her kids look so damned scared . . . I say, Go!"

Ben glanced over at Martin and raised an eyebrow. The broad-shouldered black said, "I'm in. Can't see leaving that momma and her babies up there with them jive guerrillas, money or no!"

Joe Thomas asked, "How high is this mountain they're being held on, Ben?"

"About a mile. Air currents will be a bitch, but the flying's not the thing we have to sweat. Once we say yes to this deal, we'll be laying our asses on the line. McCabe's not buying air-circus tricks. He wants an armed airborne attack. I mean, with guns, grenades, and all that jazz."

Martin said, "The chicks are out, then. All four of us have had some time in the service, and Rudy here has that big silver jug the Swiss army gave him for sharpshooting, but the chicks, now—"

Cora cut in to snap, "Don't be a pig! You guys know Della and me can whip nine out of ten grown men in a fair fight!"

Little Della nodded and said, "Cora's right. There may be as many as forty of those weirdos up there at the monastery, and besides, I'm not letting you go, Ben, unless I go along too!"

Ben smiled at his girl and said, "Hey, I know how strong your arms are, babe, but Martin's right about the guns."

Della pouted and said, "Pooh! I know how to shoot a gun. You point it at what you want to shoot and pull the trigger."

Cora added, "I can throw a grenade better than most men, too. I used to play a lot of softball before I got into hang-gliding. You guys are just being silly. All seven of us will be few enough, if those bastards up there spot us coming!"

Joe Thomas picked up the newspaper McCabe had given them and mused, "This WARA bunch comes on pretty strong about liberating the oppressed people of the world. Listen to this statement they sent to the papers. It says,

'We intend to help the helpless eliminate the cancerous disease of capitalism!' Ain't that a bitch?"

Rudy snorted, "Bullshit! They just want to do their own number on the rest of us! They don't give a damn about anyone except themselves. This Third World crap is just an excuse for old-fashioned bank-robbing. Or maybe they just like noise."

Ben Miller nodded and said, "The creeps are on an ego trip, and taking it out on women and children besides. It's tempting, gang, but I need a show of hands."

He looked at the others around the campfire, then grinned as he raised his own hand, making it unanimous.

He said, "We must be nuts." He got to his feet and walked over to where McCabe was working on his second cigarette.

McCabe looked up tensely as Ben asked quietly, "What would you have done if we'd decided the answer was no?"

McCabe's voice was flat as he shrugged and said, "I'd have gone in alone."

Ben nodded and said, "That's what I figured. We've got the hang-gliders. What about weapons?"

McCabe stood up and flicked his butt away, growling, "Start packing. I'm going into Athens to see a man about five guns."

"You'd better make it seven. Cora and my momma are coming, too."

Ben Miller braced himself for an argument, but McCabe merely nodded and said, "Right. Seven guns it is."

The dawn found Jonas Bracken tense and haggard at his bank of telephones, Henry Orkin hovering

over him, as he said, "Listen, Frank, that's not your problem. You just see the planes are ready. Where they land and what they load is my responsibility!"

Another phone was ringing as Bracken hung up on his supplier. Orkin picked it up and whispered to his employer, "It's Jim McCabe!"

Bracken grabbed the phone from Orkin and snapped, "McCabe, where are you? I've been trying to reach you all night!"

McCabe replied, "I found out where Ellen and the kids are. I'm going to get them out."

"You've what? Where *are* they, man? Have you told Nikolidis?"

"Shit, no! How are you doing at your end? Have you got the stuff WARA asked for?"

"Almost. Some of the military hardware involved a bit of red tape."

"You mean a lot of bribery, huh? What's with Nikolidis, by the way? Has he any idea where they're holding Ellen?"

"No. Of course not. What's going on, Jim?"

"Just listen. You go ahead and deal with the kidnappers, dig? I don't think they mean to live up to their end of the bargain, but I'm willing to give them a chance. I'll call just before I make my own move. If you've delivered and gotten them back safe and sound, I'll call things off at this end."

"Listen, Jim, you don't have my permission to do *anything* until I know what you're talking about!"

"Yeah, so just make sure you're alone when you get my message. I'll call you late this afternoon, just before dark. If you haven't done it your way by then, I'll have to see about doing it *my* way."

The phone went dead as Bracken yelled, "McCabe! McCabe, wait a minute!"

Across the study, one of the Greek technicians looked up and called, "Mr. Bracken, there's a message coming through!"

Bracken cradled the phone and rushed over to the two-way radio near the Greek. Captain Nikolidis came in

from the other room as the small set crackled, "Your deadline approaches, Mr. Bracken. How are you progressing? Over."

Bracken stammered, "I've got nearly everything on your list. Over."

"*Nearly* everything, Mr. Bracken? That was not our agreement. Over."

"Dammit, man, it takes *time!* I need more time. Over."

The voice of Number One purred, "Come now, Mr. Bracken. You can see by the photographs we sent you that your wife and children are still alive. You want them to stay that way, don't you? Over."

"Of course I do! Anything you say! Over."

"Then hurry, Mr. Bracken, hurry, and be careful about any clumsy attempts at a rescue. You will never find our hiding place, and, even if you do, it only takes a moment to slit a throat. Over and out!"

Bracken stared grayly at the dead radio set as Nikolidis frowned and asked, "What was that about photographs, Mr. Bracken?"

Bracken looked up dully to answer, "Oh, they sent some color shots of Ellen and the children, to show me they were all right."

Nikolidis was livid as he snapped, "They sent you pictures and you did not think to inform *me?* Have you gone utterly mad, sir?"

"Jim McCabe was trying to trace them. He said—"

"Goddam you! I will have those photographs! I will have them *now!*"

Henry Orkin said, "McCabe took Xerox copies, Captain. I'll get you the originals, if it's all right with Mr. Bracken."

Bracken looked blank. Then he nodded numbly as Orkin went to get the pictures. Nikolidis recovered enough to ask, in a calmer tone, "Didn't you know our lab men might be able to discover important clues to your family's whereabouts by analyzing the pictures, sir?"

"I'm sorry. I just wasn't thinking. Jim McCabe said he needed copies and—"

"I know what McCabe wants," Nikolidis cut in. "He

wants the reward, and if he tries another of his foolish outlaw pranks, he is going to get his own son, among others, killed!"

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The crooked lane through the heart of Athens' notorious flea-market district was too narrow to deserve a name, but the Greeks have a name for everything, and its jawbreaking title translated out as "The Street in Which the Sun Never Shines."

Hip tour guides advised their clients against exploring the slum alone. There were men, women, and children lurking in the ever-present shadows of the maze who'd kill for the loose change in your pocket, or a pair of American shoes.

But Jim McCabe was known to the residents of The Street in Which the Sun Never Shines, and while he kept an eye on the spaces between the jammed-together buildings and a hand on his wallet, he knew he was reasonably safe. The local criminal chieftains frowned on slitting the throats of repeat customers.

McCabe came to the step-down entrance of the Cross and Crescent Coffee House and, after glancing back to make sure he wasn't being tailed again by one of Captain Nikolidis' eager Junior G-Men, dropped lightly down the steps and through the beaded curtain across the arched entrance.

He threaded his way between the tables as his eyes adjusted to the gloom. The main room was filled with cigar smoke and the sickly-sweet smell of thick Turkish coffee. A spotlight shone on the tinsel bra and spangled

G-string of a wildly gyrating belly dancer. She was slick with sweat and moving her pelvis like a woman in the throes of a long-delayed orgasm, but the dancer's face, half hidden by loose strands of disheveled greasy black hair, was a mask of utter boredom.

None of the men seated at the tables seemed too interested, either. Two old geezers were playing dominos a few feet away from the dancer's hyperkinetic hips. They pretended to ignore McCabe, too. So things were looking up for the dancer. McCabe knew she doubled in brass as a call girl, and her business was better than any of these hard-eyed knockaround Greeks were letting on. Unlike other Mediterraneans, most Greeks had a cool an Old West poker player would have envied.

There was another beaded-over doorway in the rear, to one side of the noisy kitchen corridor. McCabe parted the beads and found they served to camouflage a thick, no-nonsense door with a peephole in the middle of it.

He knocked a certain way, hidden from the other customers by the fly-beads he'd let fall in place behind him, and, after a time, the door opened. Spider Kourtsounis peered at McCabe through dark Italian shades and said, "Come in, my friend. I was just having some afternoon repast. Will you join me in some halva and mint tea?"

McCabe knew Kourtsounis was being funny. Like the coffee house itself with its perverse name above the front entrance, the dapper little Greek professed to be part Turkish and pretended to like Moslem food and drink. McCabe knew for a fact the procurer and arms dealer was from an old aristocratic Greek family, but, as long as he was now socially unacceptable, Kourtsounis preferred to go all the way. A Greek Christian who mucked about with Moslems was not a man nice people wanted to associate with, but it made it easier for Kourtsounis to survive in the shadow world he operated in. He was called Spider because his web stretched all through the Middle East. He was a terrible little man but, in his own way, honest. McCabe knew he'd sell his sister for the right price, but once he made a deal, the man called Spider stuck to it.

McCabe followed Kourtsounis down to the cluttered sub-basement and into a cubbyhole carved out of stacked bales and boxes. He waited until the Greek waved him to a seat on a barrel before he asked, "Have you got the stuff I want, Spider?"

The Greek took a teapot from the top of a packing case and poured a little brass cup of mint tea for his guest. He handed it to McCabe with a dish of halva and date candy before he purred, "I can offer you a bargain on some slightly used Skoda submachine guns, Jim. A friend of mine in Tel Aviv knows a certain salvage NCO in the Israeli Army who wants to get married and—"

"Negative on Iron Curtain Arab Surplus, Spider! I want my team to have matching chambers on both their pistols and their automatic weapons. Have you got the half-dozen U.S. issue .45s I wanted?"

"Of course, but had you accepted the 9mm Walthers P-38s I offered at such a bargain—"

"Goddammit, I don't want a bargain. I want weapons that throw a man-sized slug. The Germans *lost* a war with the P-38. I figure if everyone from Uncle Sam to Castro wants the 1911 .45, it must be the best tool for the job."

Spider shrugged and said, "It's clumsy and it makes a lot of noise, but I'll admit that getting hit by a .45 round does make a man lose interest in what he was about to do to you. The pistols are no problem. Getting back to the submachine guns, your chosen ammunition presents a problem."

"So solve it. I want both weapons capable of using the same ammo. If you can't get Thompsons, I'll settle for the G.I. rip-off of the British Sten-gun. Only American issue, though. They've got to fire .45s, and I'll need banana clips, too."

The Greek nodded and said, "Six will not be impossible to procure. The price, however, will be steep."

McCabe said, "Yeah," and reached in his jacket for a folded scrap of paper. He handed it to the arms dealer and said, "This is a gizmo I designed myself. You'll notice it's made out of standard sniperscope components. Can do?"

Kourtsounis studied the drawing and smiled, saying, "I

can do better than that. The Israelis are already using such a device and this unfortunate NCO I told you about needs money to rent an apartment for him and his bride-to-be. I can have six of them in the next shipment from Tel Aviv."

"When will that be? I'm in a hurry."

"For the right price? I can order them this morning and they will be here by midnight." He sipped his own tea and added softly, "You keep changing the subject when I try to discuss terms, Jim. Is something wrong?"

McCabe took a deep breath, let half of it out so his voice wouldn't crack, and said flatly, "Spider, I don't have the money yet. You'll have to take my marker."

The Greek's expression was unreadable behind the Italian shades. He sipped at the little brass cup and sighed, "That is not the way I do business, Jim."

McCabe said, "I know, but this time you'll have to. I'm on to some very heavy action, and when it's over I'll be in a position to pay you double."

"What if I say no?"

"You won't. You know I'm a man of my word, and double or nothing is odds no Greek could ever resist."

Spider Kourtsounis put down his cup with an expression of distaste and said, "I am open to negotiations, but the price of everything has just risen more than you suggest. I know better than to ask what madness you plan, but, tell me, what do you think the odds on your getting away with it might be?"

"Less than fifty-fifty. I'm going to have to contact a druggist or a chemist, too. I have some other sketches of a gizmo I need. And, yeah, I need a machinist who's not too nosy, too."

Kourtsounis asked quietly, "Are you in a position to pay for these other technical consultants?"

McCabe said flatly, "No. You're going to have to talk your cousins into taking my marker, too."

Spider Kourtsounis sighed and said, "I was afraid of that."

But both of them knew he'd do it. Spider would never get a wink of sleep until he knew what McCabe had going down.

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McCabe and Ben Miller crawled through the scrub to the same vantage point McCabe had used before to case the monastery. A few yards back, the black man, Martin, covered their backs from a clump of maquis.

McCabe handed Ben the field glasses and pointed at Mount Roussanou with his chin, asking, "What do you think? Can we glide over to it from here?"

Ben looked down over the edge. The rocky butte the monastery perched on rose sheer from the wooded talus slopes around its base. He traced the narrow road, winding up to the top along a series of ledges and cuts blasted out of naked rock, and muttered, "We'll have to fly out, too. They'd be able to drop half the mountain on us from above as we tore around and around down that goat track."

McCabe nodded and pointed out a whitewashed village on the plain beyond, saying, "We grab the hostages and jump off again like big-ass birds. There's a rural police station and some telephones in that little town. I checked it out and it's an easy glide."

Ben shook his head and said, "I'm not as worried about getting out as I am about getting in." He turned and gave a low whistle. Martin came over to them in a crouch, automatic in one hand. Ben pointed out across the gulf and asked, "What about it, Martin? This rim is at the same altitude as the monastery grounds. That wooded rise, the walls and roofs run another fifty feet or so toward Up."

Martin shook his head and said, "No way. Not from here."

McCabe frowned and asked, "Why not? Lean out over the edge and you can *feel* the fucking thermals! We only need to climb a hundred feet or so as we cross over to that rockpile, and shit, I see a couple of hawks up there above us right now!"

Martin shrugged and said, "Hawks can flap when they start running out of sky, Pops. Once we step over the edge, we're committed."

"Yeah, but the rising thermals—"

"At *night,* Pops? Any drafts around these cliffs at night figure to be *down*drafts, you dig?"

Ben Miller agreed, saying, "Night gliding is fast, flat and mostly down, McCabe. Night air is heavier and thicker, so we're good for the distance, even loaded down with gear. There's no real soaring at night, though, so we've got to come in from some place well above that butte out there."

Martin nodded and observed, "One pass is all we're good for, too. Miss the altitude on the way in and there's no refund. You can't zoom up more than a few feet in cool night air, so it's land on the top or swerve around to keep from kissing the side of the mountain with your noseplate. We've got to start from at least a couple of hundred feet above those rooftops, over there."

McCabe smashed a fist against his own thigh as the black athlete pointed to the northeast and added, "I like that sawtooth ridge, over that way. It's a long long way to tip a rarey, but at least we'd be starting out at the top."

McCabe glanced at the distant row of darker peaks, ready to object that they seemed no higher than the limestone massif they were on. Then he took a second look and said, "Gotcha! That crossgrained ridge is harder rock, left all alone in the sky when the rest of this limestone massif eroded away around its gums. How much higher do you think that tallest chimney is?"

Ben shrugged and said, "Not as much as I would have designed it if I were God, but what the hell. We can drive to the base on the other side without being spotted from

the monastery. We'll have to drag our kites up on lines, and taking off between those sharktooth peaks will be a bitch. It would be frantic enough if we could see what we were doing."

"I've got night goggles, guys," said McCabe. "Infrared headlamps for our kites, too. We ought to be able to see where we're headed, without them spotting us in the dark."

Martin muttered, "*Now* he tells us! Don't we get to practice some with these Buck Rogers headlights of yours, Pops?"

McCabe said, "No. I just picked them up this morning, and we have to go in tonight!"

Over on Mount Roussanou, Number One was feeling on top of the world in more ways than one. Although he hid it even to himself beneath a cloak of pious self-pity, the man who called himself Number One was an instinctive bully. His disfigurement in the Paris student riots had not been received as innocently as he was given to whimpering about, even to his followers.

To the forty-odd emotionally disturbed individuals he'd recruited with utopian promises of a brave new world, Number One was a man of mystery as well as destiny.

To those few who knew his true identity, he was a psychotic sadist who'd started out as a rich young twit with too much time and not enough work to keep his hyperkinetic imagination occupied. As a bright but unruly student, he'd traded in the strict rules of reason that were

part of the high standards of a French education for the sloppy, easy answers of the romantic utopians. Despite his habit of quoting Marx, Engels, Owens, and even Howard, Number One had never really read one of their books all the way through. Like many a religious fanatic, he was given to glib catchphrases, taken out of context and often having no relation to the original meaning of the text. Thus, having no rational point from which to start, he'd found himself outwitted and even ridiculed in any political argument with the brighter students at the Sorbonne, even before the riots.

Despite his newly contrived biography, Number One had been rejected, out of hand, as a leader of the student radicals. He'd tagged along as a desperate young stooge, anxious to make a name for himself in Left Bank circles. Unable to recruit his own following from among the more intelligent elements of the mob, he'd used his considerable allowance to buy the temporary allegiance of some street-gang toughs and led them on a wild foray through the back alleys of Paris, looting, smashing, and beating up random victims until they ran into some real rebels, coming the other way.

Disgusted with the perverse and pointless savagery of Number One's apaches, the true student radicals had sailed into them to give them the beating they so richly deserved. Number One's face had been smashed by a youth who later died, fighting for his own left-wing cause against other grown men on the other side, but the battered young bully had chosen to say, when he dragged himself away to his few true friends, that he'd been beaten by a police informer. In time, he'd come to believe the story himself.

Making the radical's club a policeman's rifle butt had been an artistic afterthought. He'd told it that way so often that in his mind's eye he could actually picture the steel butt plate coming at him as he fought beside his comrades at the barricades.

As he walked along the parapet of the deserted monastery, Number One was gloating silently at just how far he'd come since the police had left him, nearly lifeless, on the Paris streets.

His original allowance, still sent to him by a disgusted family who were anxious to keep him far away, had enabled him to recruit the cadre of his ragtag band. A few armed robberies had given him working capital and swollen his ranks to its present size. If he pulled this last coup off, he knew he'd be well on his way to becoming a real force to be reckoned with. Europe and the Middle East were swarming with disturbed young radicals looking for a cause, any cause, to follow. Some of the followers he had at the moment were disillusioned Palestinians, others were out-of-work Belgian mercenaries who'd been driven out of the Congo. He'd picked up some leftovers from the American peace movement, a couple of IRA men drummed out by their former comrades for rape, and at least one Greek Fascist from the "Colonels' Regime." Past differences had been forgotten as all concentrated on the one thing they had in common, a shared hate for the world as they now found it, a world they couldn't fit themselves into, a world they intended to change.

A lizard sunned itself on the rocks of the parapet as Number One approached. The terrorist leader stopped and slowly drew a trench knife from the scabbard on his gun belt. He hefted the heavy blade, easing forward on the balls of his feet and, *voila!* he had it—almost.

The blade came down, aimed at the lizard's tiny neck. It sliced off the tail instead as the frightened little reptile dove headfirst down the cliffside. Number One grimaced and toyed with the still-twitching tail with the point of his knife. He flicked it over the edge and wondered idly if the fall would kill the lizard. It would probably not, he thought. He'd heard or read someplace that lizards, mice, and other small animals could fall from any height without gaining enough speed to kill themselves when they landed. The nasty little thing would probably grow a new tail, too. Some things were beyond even Number One's control.

There was a throbbing in the sky and the twisted man looked up. It was Marcel, in the stolen helicopter. Number One had sent him out on a recon flight, after one of the others had reported seeing movement among the trees above the cliffs to the north.

The rebel leader strolled between two outbuildings

toward the small flat space, downslope, that the monks had used for burials and WARA used for a helicopter pad. The little two-place chopper beat him to the place and was setting its skids on the flattened tombstones, its rotor blades still whirling, as Number One reached it.

Marcel, a small wiry Piccard with a bushy head, got out and came to meet Number One, saying, "It was nothing my leader. Only a boy and some goats."

"Did you liquidate the goatherd, Number Eighteen?" asked Number One.

Marcel looked confused and stammered, "Liquidate, my leader? It was only a little boy, herding his father's goats in the maquis. He must be from that village down below."

"Assuming, of course, he was not a police spy. You should have killed him. We are only hours away from victory. This is no time to be sentimental about peasant children!"

Marcel shrugged and said, "I agree, of course, but shooting the goatherd from the air might attract attention, my leader. He didn't seem interested in anything going on over here. He was well in from the cliff's edge, and—"

"Never mind. I don't want anyone searching for missing children on that massif over there, and even if it is some sort of police trick, what can they do? We are invulnerable in this fortress of ours, *hein?*"

Marcel looked relieved and said, "My thoughts exactly, Number One. Has the American agreed to your terms?"

"But of course! What choice have I given the capitalist pig? He seems to be having difficulty with the fighter plane, but clearing it with his fat bloated friends is *his* problem. We shall have it, or the executions shall commence tomorrow at dawn. I had an idea just now about the sheer face to the south. If we were to drop the little girl over the side, she'd fall a clear two hundred meters before she bounced off the roadway shelf below."

Marcel licked his lips and asked, "Do we have to kill the children, my leader? I know the woman must die in any case, since, as you told us, she tore away your mask when she tried to seduce you in her cell. The boy,

too, is old enough to be our sworn enemy. But . . . the three-year-old?"

Number One shrugged and said, "I don't *enjoy* the thing I have to do to save the world, Number Eighteen, but sentimentality has no place in the Superman's mentality. Did I ever tell you what I admired most about Heinrich Himmler?"

Marcel just looked confused.

Number One went over to a nearby tombstone, still standing, albeit at an angle, and sat down on it, saying, "The Nazis were fools, as you know, but Himmler himself had a devotion to duty one must admire in any man. You see, unlike many of his comrades, Heinrich Himmler did not *enjoy* hurting people."

Marcel stood awkwardly in the afternoon sunlight of the small courtyard and asked, "Are we speaking of the same Heinrich Himmler who was in charge of Hilter's SS, my leader?"

"Yes, a man who deserved a better cause than the one he followed. You see, Himmler was, basically, a devoted follower. Under other German leaders, he'd have been content to be a plodding bookkeeper or office manager. Such jobs were clearly more to his natural tastes. But, as we know, he found himself in charge of the SS, ordered to exterminate the enemies of the Third Reich."

"We read about Himmler in school, my leader. He would seem to have killed something like six million people, before he killed himself."

"I know, but the point is *how* he administered the final solution. You see, Himmler was a family man, who liked children. When the roundup and execution of the Polish Jews began, there was no problem about what was to be done with the adults. Himmler's men had been raised to hate Poles as well as Jews, and one night they were liquidating them in droves beside a railroad siding. The trains from Warsaw would come in, unload a carload of captives at a time, and the execution squads would simply shoot them and dump the bodies in a mass grave dug beside the track. Himmler, on this occasion, was there in person to supervise his men's activities. It was early in the program, you see, and some of the men were grumbling."

Number One's eyes were glazed in reverie as he purred, "Picture the scene, if you will. A damp September night, illuminated by torches as the dark huddled figures are herded out of the cars and over to the edge of the mass grave. There is little said. Some of the women are crying, but the prisoners are cold and tired after the long cramped ride in the boxcars, and besides, they don't quite know what's happening. The SS men line up behind them, each one putting the muzzle of his pistol to the nape of a victim's neck. The command is given. A ragged volley of muffled shots, and, *voilà,* the line of prisoners falls like a row of dominoes into the yawning pit!"

"But you said there was some problem, my leader."

"There was. You see, one of the boxcars had been loaded with Jewish *children,* separated from their parents in the fight for Warsaw. They ranged in ages from eight or nine down to toddlers. Some, I daresay, were as young, and, well, precious, as our little Susie Bracken. The SS men were hardened killers, but, I'm afraid, a bit too human for the job they'd been given."

"They balked at executing the children, my leader?"

"Yes. It was a very tense moment for Heinrich Himmler. He had an order to carry out, but the leader of his SS detail came over, clicked his heels, saluted, and asked to be excused from what he considered a distasteful act. That was when Himmler showed his true character."

"Ah, he shot his unruly subordinate, then?"

"No. He addressed the SS men like a father, told them he knew it was a nasty business, but that he was not a man who'd order anyone to do anything he wasn't willing to do himself."

Number One's eyes glinted madly as he continued, "Himmler went over to the line of frightened, whimpering children, picked out the prettiest little girl he could find, and took her by the hand. He led her to the edge of the pit, drew his 9mm pistol, and shoved the muzzle in her mouth as he pulled the trigger. He blew her little brains out, pitched her in on top of the other bodies, and holstered his gun. Then he went over to lean against a railway car, sobbed, and threw up. He was, you'll remember, a family man."

"Mon Dieu! What happened then?"

"The executions proceeded as ordered, of course. The SS men had no choice. Their leader had set them a splendid example, and to the end of the war, they followed it to the letter. Do you understand what I am trying to say, Number Eighteen?"

"I'm not sure. What do you want me to do, my leader?"

"Nothing I would not do myself. When it comes time to execute the prisoners, I shall kill all three of them myself. The little girl will be thrown from the parapet. The boy, I think, should be burned at the stake The woman . . . ah, I need more time to think about the woman."

Martin did get to try out one of the other pieces of equipment Jim McCabe had procured from the illegal arms dealer—who had asked, very nicely, to be kept out of the newspapers if and when it all went down as planned.

During the few days he'd been with the barnstormers, McCabe had learned of Martin's skill with an old-fashioned slingshot.

The hedgerows they were often camped beside were teeming with pheasant, rabbit, and other small game. Since the European police were into gun control, and the local game laws were stricter than the ones back home, Martin had refined his boyhood skill with a silent slingshot to a fine art.

The results, up to now, had been a welcome variation in the diet of the vagabond flying-circus team. Cora's specialty was pheasant stuffed with sage, rosemary, oregano, and other wild herbs she picked from the maquis-covered hillsides. Rudy, on the other hand, made a very accept-

able Hasenpfeffer, given a few plump rabbits to start with. Their one attempt at hedgehog goulash had not been pronounced a success.

At any rate, the powerful, long-limbed black man was deadly with the little pocket slingshot he'd sent away for. Martin's long reach stretched the surgical tubing of the small silent weapon to the maximum, and he could literally knock a squirrel's eye out at ninety feet. Jim McCabe wasn't worried about him hitting a squirrel. He had a man-sized target in mind.

He led Martin up a rocky slope, not far from the Sky Riders' camp. One of Greece's ubiquitous wandering goats was grazing near the ridge. It was a tough old billy, and its mass was little less than that of a human being. McCabe handed Martin one of the special darts he'd had prepared in Athens and whispered, "Okay, let's see how good you are with the slingshot."

Martin stared soberly down at the heavy metal missile in his palm and said, "Gee, Pops, I don't know. That goat must belong to some fool Greek."

"The effects are only temporary. Go ahead. Let's see what you can do."

Martin shrugged, put the dart in the pouch of the slingshot, and drew back smoothly, muttering, "Have a nice snooze, you hairy mother!"

He let fly, and for a moment nothing happened. The goat looked up belligerently as the dart thunked into its rump. Then it turned its head to scratch at its own rear with its horns, as if trying to rid itself of a tick.

Martin said, "Shoot! It didn't even spook the critter!"

Then the goat collapsed in a sodden heap and he added, "Wow! I take that back! What did you put in them jive darts, Pops?"

McCabe replied, "Nicotine sulfate, mostly. It's the same shit they use to tranquilize wild animals long enough to move them into a cage."

"Yeah? Well, that goat's on a real nod, all right. How long before it wears off?"

McCabe looked at his wrist and said, "That's one of the things I want to find out. He should be on his feet and looking for some tin cans to eat in about thirty minutes."

"I'm not as uptight about how long as I am about how soon, Pops. That goat stayed on his feet long enough to have pulled a trigger, if he'd been the trigger-pulling kind."

"You may be right. We'd better increase the dosage."

"You think that'll be safe?"

McCabe's eyes were cold as he shrugged and answered, "For us, yes. For them, no. You shouldn't go around kidnapping people if you don't want anyone to maybe fold, staple, or mutilate you a bit."

Martin didn't answer for a moment. He went over to the goat, knelt, and felt its throat. Then he straightened up and said, "Old Billy's still alive. But if we want to waste these turkeys with O.D. darts, why not just shoot the mothers and be done with it?"

"We may have to shoot a mess of them, Martin. The darts are *silent,* though. If we can take out a few sentries or lookouts without the others knowing about it . . . "

"Gotcha! That means I'll be going in ahead of you, huh? I should have known there was a catch to it."

"I'll be right beside you, Martin, but, yeah, the two of us will spearhead the attack. What's the matter? Too rich for your blood?"

Martin grinned boyishly and answered, "No, but you know what? I think I liked it better when dudes like me got to ride in the *back* of the bus!"

McCabe laughed and said, "Come on. Let's get back to the others and see how Jim's coming with his Green Beret lessons."

Leaving the goat to sleep off the effects of their experiment, the two men headed back to camp. The rattle of small-arms fire was partly muffled by the thick hedgerows of the remote olive grove they'd settled on as a training ground. McCabe had been delighted to turn much of the training over to Joe Thomas, after learning Joe had seen some action in Vietnam with the Special Forces. The other men had all seen at least some service, and Cora, in particular, had turned out to be a crack shot who wasn't as frightened as most novices by the climbing recoil of a submachine gun.

As they approached the camp, Martin said, "There's one thing bothering me about this scene, Pops."

"Yeah? What's that?"

"The secrecy bit, man. I mean, you say we got to keep our plans secret from them WARA turkeys, and I can dig it, but what about the fuzz? How come the law's not in on this action, if what you figure to pull off is legal?"

"I already explained, Martin. We can't have these bush-league cops gumming up the works with their cowboy act. I told you how Captain Nikolidis screwed up at the stadium the other night, and, if we invite him along, he's likely to drop the ball on us again."

"Yeah, but you're talking about maybe having to waste some dudes, Pops! I mean, I've heard all I want to about Greek jails, and if somebody decides it's against the law to blow folks off a mountain top . . . "

"Relax. The WARA nuts don't have any friends, and I do. Besides, Jonas Bracken could buy the whole damned country if he had to. He's not going to let us go down for rescuing his wife and family, is he?"

"No, but what if we smoke up a lot of dudes and the hostages get wasted in the rumble? I mean, Pops, a lot of folks are gonna be *mad* at us, you dig?"

McCabe didn't answer. He'd been hoping nobody but himself had thought of that.

Captain Nikolidis' staff had gone through their own reference files and, not finding what they wanted, raided the Athens University Library.

The captain had insisted on Jonas Bracken coming down to the police headquarters with him, to answer further questions and, perhaps, to keep an eye on him. Nikolidis understood the multi-millionaire's concern for his family, but WARA was not about to get their hands on any jet fighters if Nikolidis could help it. He'd been busy on his own phones, calling, threatening, and bluffing to throw as many monkey wrenches as he could into the smoothly oiled machinery of Bracken's international network of friends and associates. His call to the American Consulate had been unauthorized and outside of channels, and, if he wasn't careful, Captain Nikolidis was going to wind up pounding a beat in uniform again. Meanwhile, the delivery of the military planes had been nicely mired in red tape.

Jonas Bracken was pacing the captain's office like a caged lion while Nikolidis worked on a huge sandwich, the only food he'd had all day. The American kept glancing anxiously out the window, aware how time was slipping away while these stubborn Greeks held up the negotiations. From time to time he'd whirl and snap something like, "Goddamm it, Captain, they've sworn to kill all three of them!" and Nikolidis would mutter, "We're working on it."

Secretly, Nikolidis was as worried as any man could be who wasn't facing the executions of his own wife and children. He'd hoped, when he'd spotted the background murals in the pictures Bracken had finally shown him, to have a better line by now on where the hostages were being held. It hadn't taken his staff long to decide the religious paintings had been done by the master Theophanos, but, damm it, the monk had painted too many old buildings in and around Athens.

The office door opened and a man in a Greek army uniform came in. Speaking English, in deference to the captain's guest, the army officer said, "We have a line on one of the terrorists, Captain. His name is Tsotsos and there's a military-desertion warrant out on him. Tsotsos was involved in illegal executions for the old regime and went into hiding to avoid a court-martial when democracy was restored."

Nikoldis shrugged and removed the sandwich from his mouth to ask, "Does anyone know where this unfortunate Fascist might be at the moment?"

The officer said, "No. We picked up one of his former associates and learned only that he's run off with WARA. A very ruthless man, this Petros Tsotsos is. He has killed before and may kill again with little reason."

Nikolidis sighed and said, "We live in interesting times, as the old Chinese curse would have it. Wars used to be fought by a few long-term professionals. Now we see that every young man on both sides of the Iron Curtain is taught to use a gun. How many millions of students and street urchins have we trained to be killers in the last thirty-odd years? It's small wonder we now live in such a violent century."

Bracken turned from the window to ask, "Are you doing a damned thing to rescue my wife and children, Captain, or do we have to listen to your damned philosophy until they're all dead?"

Nikolidis said, "We're going to find WARA and bring the maniacs to justice, one way or another, my friend. You have my word on it."

"Damm it! I don't want Ellen and the kids one way or another! I want them alive and well! You've got to let me get back to the radio for further negotiations!"

Nikolidis threw the remains of his sandwich into a wastebasket and said, "At the risk of sounding philosophical, sir, I have no intention of letting you deliver the arms for a medium-sized war to those insane terrorists. I assure you I am doing everything in my power to ensure the safety of your family, but, while the thought of them being harmed sickens me, I must think of my duty to the rest of humanity. Those idiots demand a jet fighter with guided missiles! Have you any idea at all what a degenerate could do at the controls of a modern fighter plane?"

"Look, after I get Ellen and the kids back, we could put some other fighters up and—"

"*We,* Mr. Bracken?" Nikolidis cut in. "It will not be *your* job to deal with WARA, once you've armed them. *Greek* pilots will be sent to intercept that jet

fighter, if they get the chance. On the other hand, WARA may not choose to do battle with our meager air force. Judging from the past, Number One will probably want to make a name for himself by putting a Sidewinder or two into a passenger jet! How many passengers on a 707, Mr. Bracken? Over a hundred, won't it be?"

The army man said, "They already have a helicopter. The theft of a two-place civilian helicopter has been traced to men associated with the terrorist Tsotsos. We know Tsotsos has a French friend named Marcel Bouvier. The man is a known Communist and a licensed pilot. Bouvier has not been seen around his usual haunts, of late."

Nikolidis shrugged and said, "They probably have at least three pilots with them, then. They've demanded two planes from Mr. Bracken here. I have been willing to go along with the delivery of the cargo plane. I have even said I'd allow the small arms and ammunition. But the missiles and jet fighters? Never!"

Bracken said, "You won't be able to stop me, once Henry Orkin gets through to certain people in your government."

Before Nikolidis had to think of an answer to the threat, the door opened a second time and two men in civilian clothes came in with a briefcase and some bound volumes.

The older of the pair was smiling grimly as he said, *"Eureka!"* Nikolidis glanced at Bracken and said, "Speak English, Detective Parakos. What is it you've found?"

Parakos opened his briefcase to spread a map and some fine-art photographs on the captain's desk. "I have found the place, my captain. Professor Vakkas here was able to narrow it down to three possible sites where Theophanos painted frescoes such as those in the extortion photos. Discreet investigation has eliminated two of them."

He pointed to the red circle he'd outlined on the map and Nikolidis breathed triumphantly, "Roussanou! Of course! It has to be Roussanou!"

He grinned at Bracken and added, "It's an old

monastery, not five hours from Athens by road. We'll go for them under cover of darkness and—"

"Not until they've returned my family!" cut in Bracken.

Nikolidis snapped, "Don't be an ass! You'll never see them alive again, if you deliver the arms they demand. Besides, I have no intention of letting you do such a mad thing! Your family's only hope is a well-managed rescue operation!"

"Like the operation you managed so well at the stadium? These fiends are too smart for you, Captain. They've given me their word and—"

"The word of a madman means nothing, Mr. Bracken. I know the promises of Hitler and Stalin were made while you were still a child, but some of us have learned, to our sorrow, not to trust the word of an avowed enemy of the human race!"

"I have no choice, damn it! I can see for myself they're being held in a remote mountain area. What will happen if they discover your rescue attempt before your men can get in there?"

"But they will not discover it. I assure, you, sir, I know better now what manner of man we are dealing with. He will never trick me like that a second time."

"Hell no, he'll trick you another way! Number One is a criminal genius, Captain!"

"Forgive me, but a criminal genius is a contradiction in terms, Mr. Bracken. Please don't mistake insanity for intelligence."

"I can't underestimate what will happen if you blow it again, either!"

The phone on the captain's desk rang and one of the detectives picked it up. He told Nikolidis, "It's for Mr. Bracken, sir."

"Who is it?" The captain asked.

"A Mr. McCabe. He says it's urgent."

Nikolidis nodded and said, "Take the call, Mr. Bracken."

Then he picked up a second phone and pushed a button, cutting in on the line as Bracken answered the call. Bracken asked, "Jim?" and McCabe snapped, "God-damm it, Jonas, where the hell are you? Orkin put me

through to this number. I've been trying to reach you for almost an hour!"

"I'm with Nikolidis, at police headquarters."

"Shit! Is he on the line?"

"Jim, he found the photographs."

"Found them? Or did you give them to him, you jerk?"

Nikolidis spoke into his other phone, saying, "Where are you, Mr. McCabe? What madness are you planning now?"

"Same question to *you,* cop! Why don't you go out and play in the traffic while Jonas and I work something out?"

"I warn you, James McCabe, wherever you are and whatever you're planning to do, I demand you leave this matter entirely to me!"

"Look, we all want the same thing, but I know where they're holding Ellen and the kids and you don't so—"

"They are at Roussanou. We have only this minute learned of it, but I'm already making plans for a rescue and you would only be in the way."

McCabe considered a bluff, decided against it, and pleaded, "Hey, stay the fuck away from the place, Nikolidis. WARA's given Bracken until tomorrow afternoon, and I've got a plan you'd never believe."

"I too have a plan, Mr. McCabe. I am not the fool you take me for. They will never see us coming. You are right about the deadline, and I assume you too traced the frescoes to Roussanou. Stay out of it and don't take the chance the terrorists will discover we've uncovered their hiding place. My men and I will—"

"Your men and you will blow it! I've cased the joint, Nikolidis! There's one goat path winding up this king-sized treestump of solid rock. You'll never make it on foot, and if you try to come in with choppers, they'll hear you miles away!"

"I have visited Roussanou, Mr. McCabe. I know what I am going to have to do."

"Okay. Look, how much time do *I* have? What's the zero hour for your goddam banzai charge?"

Nikolidis hesitated. Then he said, "I shall tell you so you won't get in our way. I plan to strike in predawn darkness, hoping to catch most of them asleep. If you or any of your friends should happen to be in our way as we move

in, I refuse to be responsible for your safety. We all know these people we are dealing with are armed and dangerous. My men may be, how do you say, trigger-happy."

Jonas Bracken cut in to demand, "Where are you, Jim? What are you up to?"

McCabe said, "I'm in Kalambaka, at the moment. Don't bother to trace this call, Nikolidis. I don't plan to stay here long."

Nikolidis shot a glance at the map and whispered, "That's a village near Roussanou."

Bracken insisted, "What's up, Jim? So help me, if you go off half-cocked and get my wife and our kids killed, I'll . . . I'll put a contract out on you, goddammit!"

McCabe laughed and asked, "Is that any way to talk in a police station, old buddy? For shame, but not to worry. Is his nibs still on the line?"

Nikolidis nodded and said, "What do you want with me, Mr. McCabe?"

"I want your word you'll hold off until at least four a.m. My guys might be trigger-happy, too."

Bracken stammered, "Guys? There's more than one of you? Don't do it, Jim! You said yourself there's no way in by surface or air!"

McCabe laughed again and said, "You won't believe this, boys, but I just grew wings. If you guys will just hold off until four or so, I think Batman and Robin might just pull it off!"

Before Bracken could ask him what the devil he was talking about, there was a click and the line went dead. Bracken put down the phone, muttering, "That goddam crazy idiot!"

Nikolidis replaced his own phone on its cradle, asking, "What did he mean about growing wings? What is a batman or a robin?"

"*I* don't know what he's talking about, Captain. The crazy bastard's never made sense since the first day I met him."

Nikolidis looked at his watch and decided, "We can't allow him to interfere. It's nearly nine. Roussanou is a five-hour drive from here. If we start at once, we can reach the place by two a.m."

"I thought you said it was better to go in around four a.m."

"It would be, if McCabe wasn't planning some madness of his own." He turned to the military man and said, "We shall need some mountain infantry, Lieutenant. Can I count on you?"

The officer nodded and said, "I shall have to clear it with my commandant, but I am certain he will cooperate, if only to bring the deserter Tsotsos to justice!"

Bracken stammered, "I can't persuade you to wait? I know McCabe is crazy, but Jimmy is his son, and McCabe's a tricky son of a bitch!"

"We are leaving within the hour. My mind's made up."

Bracken nodded and said, "I know how to use a gun. I'm going with you."

Nikolidis chided, "Mr. Bracken, you'd only be in the way."

But Jonas Bracken said flatly, "It's my wife and kids up there, goddam you all! I'm going with you, armed, and I'm going to personally kill every one of those sons of bitches if they've hurt Ellen or the children!"

Nikolidis and the army man exchanged glances. Then the police captain smiled and said, "I do hope you'll be generous enough to leave one or two of them for me? Lieutenant Sophos, as I told you, was a member of *my* family."

The moon was playing hide-and-seek behind the scudding clouds of a low overcast as Jim McCabe and

the others pushed and hauled their hang-gliders up the jagged granite of their chosen chimney rock.

The moonlight was a mixed blessing. It helped them all to keep from falling off the mountain prematurely, but it meant they'd have to wait until it set before they dared push off. The almanac gave 1:47 a.m. as the time for moonset. McCabe knew that was cutting it close, but he couldn't count on Nikolidis to hold off until four a.m. They'd have to go in as soon as it was dark enough to cross the gap between the peaks unseen.

The wind was picking up as they inched higher, and, even folded, the Rogallo wings kept fluttering like monstrous bats, straining at their leashes. It was difficult enough to clamber over the nearly vertical rock faces unencumbered. Fighting a flapping hang-glider at the same time was impossible. But somehow they were making it.

McCabe rolled up onto a five-foot shelf and drove a piton into the granite with his alpenstock. He snapped a nylon line through the splitring of the piton and started hauling up his folded hang-glider as Ben Miller steadied it from below.

A million years went by, and then he had his and Miller's gliders safely up beside him. Ben came up the line, hand over hand, and flopped beside McCabe, saying, "I don't like this wind. Unless it dies down before we reach the top, all bets are off. We can't fly in winds like these peaks are growing tonight."

McCabe said, "It's tonight or never. We go at two a.m., or we don't go at all."

Martin came up the line in time to catch the last of the discussion, and the moonlight glinted on his teeth as he said, "Well, my vote is *no*. I think I'd rather walk after all."

He and Ben laughed, but McCabe didn't think it was funny. He said, "Those fucking cops will be lousing things up as soon as they get here. We've simply got to beat them to the punch, wind or no wind."

Ben shrugged and said, "Let's get moving, then. We sure as hell can't take off from here!"

McCabe started inching up again, carrying the line, as Martin wet his finger, held it out over the sheer drop and marveled, "Whoo-eee! My momma done told me! That's a

forty-knot gust if ever I stuck my fool finger into one! What did you say the airspeed of a Rogallo wing was, Big Daddy?"

Ben's voice was bleak as he answered, "You know that, Marty. Twenty-five to thirty knots."

"That's what I thought, but I was hoping you'd tell me I was wrong. If we take off into a forty-knot wind, we figure to wind up flying backwards, don't we?"

"That's about the size of it. Want to pack it in?"

Martin looked up and said, "Shoot, we're closer to the top than we are to the bottom. Maybe the wind will die down a bit by the time we have to take off."

"Yeah, and maybe it won't. I saw the kids in the picture too, old buddy. You're not just in this for the money, are you?"

Martin shrugged and said, "At least tonight I know what the fuck I'm doing it for. I mind one time in Nam when they asked me to waste some dinks in black pajamas who hadn't bothered nobody I could give a damn about. You think those mothers across the way would really waste that bitty little gal in them pictures?"

"We know these WARA cats play rough. No decent knockaround guy would have snatched that little Susan in the first place. They had that rich dude's wife, if all they wanted was the ransom."

"Yeah, I guess they must be mean motherfuckers. I guess we'll just have to fly over there and teach them to be cool with little kids."

Cora came over the edge, cursing like a sailor as she hauled her hang-glider after her. Ben and Martin helped her as she spit a strand of hair out of her mouth and muttered, "This fucking wind is just too fucking *much,* you know?"

Ben asked, "How's Della making out?" and Cora snorted, "Shit, she's okay. There isn't as much of her for the wind to grab. Are we really going to be able to take off in this shit, Ben?"

Ben leaned over the drop, reaching down to give Della a hand as his girl climbed up the rope before he said, "I don't know. It may not be gusting so bad, topside."

As he hauled Della up, Martin frowned and observed,

"We're about at the same level as the monastery, right now. These same gusts will be tearing the tiles off the roofs over there as we come in. I mean, even do we get above these currents—"

Cora cut in with, "Aw, screw the wind. Maybe it will drive the mothers inside for cover, at least."

Ben finished helping Della to the flat ledge. As she sprawled beside him, gasping for breath, he asked, "You okay, kitten?"

Della croaked, "It only hurts when I laugh. How much farther do we have to climb?"

Ben said, "McCabe is almost to the top by now. According to him, it's flat up there. We'll take another break and snap the cross tubes into place while we see what this damned wind feels like doing."

Cora said, "Wind or no wind, we've got to give it a shot. Jim says this is the last night we have, and the Greek fuzz will be along any minute to screw things up."

Della shot her companion a curious look as she smiled and asked, "So it's 'Jim,' now, Cora? I didn't know you dug older men."

Cora flushed and answered, "Hey, come on, it's not that way with Jim and me. I mean, what am I supposed to call the guy? Mister?"

Martin said, "Not after he's kissed you, Momma. I seen you sneaking off in the bushes with him yesterday."

Cora laughed and punched Martin's shoulder, secretly pleased at the banter of her friends. She knew there was nothing between herself and the big man with the lived-in face. She knew the kind of girls men like Jim McCabe went for. Pretty little Dresden dolls with Kewpie-doll lips and soft flabby curves. What would he want with a big butch broad like herself? There wasn't an ounce of flab on Cora's body, and her strong hands were callused as a farmboy's. What could he see of the soft feminine girl hidden inside her muscular body?

Up above, McCabe shook the line to get their attention, just as Joe and Rudy joined them on the ledge. Ben Miller said, "He's reached the top and secured the line, I hope."

He tested it with his arms, found it fastened at the other end, and started up it, yelling, "Let me get up before any-

one else puts his or her weight on this glorified clothesline. There's not so much as a hairline crack on this last stretch!"

He hauled himself up to the flat top to find McCabe standing on a broad expanse of wind-whipped bare rock, staring morosely over at the monastery in the distance. Ben called down, "Start fastening the kites!"

McCabe joined him near the last piton he'd hammered home. Down below, Martin secured two hang-gliders to the end of the line, shouting, "Wait till I shinny up this mother and I'll help you hoist them two at a time."

It was a good suggestion. At forty-four pounds each, two gliders and the weapons strapped to them weighed little more than a hundred pounds. Rudy and Joe sent the gliders and girls up ahead before they scrambled up to join McCabe on the peak. Joe Thomas took a last look down the line and muttered, "Jee-zuss! I'd sure hate to have to go back down this mountain the hard way."

Ben Miller said, "You may have to," as a gust of wind half staggered him on the weathered gray granite they'd chosen as their launching platform.

McCabe said, "Hey, come on, it's only coming in gusts. We can step off between the puffs and—"

"Man!" Martin cut in. "*You* are a *fool!* You really expect me to throw my poor black ass over the side in total darkness and a wind gusting to forty knots?"

McCabe said, "Yes. You'll have the infrared goggles and—"

"Hey, don't give me that jive about Buck Rogers and the moon going down, Pops. We followed you up here, didn't we?"

McCabe swallowed the unaccustomed lump in his throat as Cora added, "Not to worry, Jimbo. You knew we were all nuts when you signed us up!"

☆☆☆☆

Over on Mount Roussanou, Number One was careful not to show a light as he opened a door in the side of the refectory and stepped outside. The wind seemed to be dying down a bit as the moon sank over the horizon to the east. That was good. It was hard to hear a plane or helicopter above the eternal moan of these mountain breezes. If Jonas Bracken planned a doublecross and had somehow found out where WARA's headquarters were, tonight would be his last chance.

A masked guard challenged Number One as the terrorist leader moved between two buildings on his tour of inspection. Number One identified himself and nodded approvingly. His followers were alert, and zero hour approached with every ticking of the clock. By this time tomorrow night, WARA would be on its way to another hideout on the North African coast, by air. Unless, of course, the capitalist pigs behaved in some foolish manner. In that case . . .

Number One moved down to the helicopter pad to make certain the helicopter was fueled and ready to go. It would be a pity to leave the others behind, but a man of destiny leaves nothing to chance, and there were only two seats in the helicopter. He and Marcel would have to start from scratch, recruiting a new army, but if Bracken betrayed them, what other choice did he have? Some of the others had questioned his choice of this headquarters, pointing out that once their position had been detected, there would be no way out for them. It was just as well they had faith in him.

He'd been at a loss to come up with an escape plan involving all of them, but they'd accepted his assurances blindly, like the good soldiers he'd trained them to be, and if it came to a temporary setback, mere soldiers were disposable. The true strength of WARA was completely in his own head. As long as *he* survived, WARA was invincible.

A gun bolt snicked in the darkness and Number One said, *"C'est moi, Numero Un!"*

When the guard asked, "That you, boss?" in English, Number One sighed and said, "Yes. What are you doing away from your post, Number Four?"

The shadowy figure in the graveyard answered, "I thought I'd better guard the helicopter, chief."

"You mean you wanted to get out of the wind, don't you? Get back out to the parapet and keep an eye on the valley below. This will be our last night here. Not a time for you to be shirking your duty!"

"Hey, come on, nobody knows we're here, do they?"

"You will return to your post, now, or you will die."

"Look, I'm going, I'm going, okay? I only asked what—"

"You will ask nothing. Soldiers do as they are told. They do not ask questions. *I* ask all the questions here. Is that understood?"

"Yessir, I'm on my way."

The guard left Number One alone in the deserted burial plot with the silent camouflaged helicopter. The terrorist stared at its black form, trying to remember what he'd come here for. It was difficult at times for a man of destiny to keep his thoughts straight. He had so much to do, so much on his mind, and his head was starting to hurt again.

How long had it been since his last fix? It wasn't as if he *needed* cocaine. The medication only served to clear his thinking, and helped to ease the pain of his chronic migraine attacks. His head had never felt quite comfortable since those capitalist running dogs had beaten it out of shape that night in . . . Paris? Yes, it had to have been Paris. He'd been having these odd persistent dreams about being beaten unconscious, or perhaps

killed, in some alley behind a Munich beer cellar. His comrades, he knew, had composed a hymn to his memory. Yet here he was, obviously alive and planning some great deed. A deed he'd remember better after he sniffed a little of his medication.

Number One's steps were hurried as he left the burial plot, humming that same tune that kept coming back like some forgotten memory. It was a haunting, military dirge, and other young men had sung it under marching torches and banners along the Munich streets before Number One had been born. He had no way of knowing its forbidden name as he headed for his quarters, humming the "Horst Wessel Lied."

The radio cruiser slowed down as its driver spotted a tiny blue gleam by the side of the road. He murmured, "Checkpoint Kappa, my captain," and Nikolidis said, "Stop the car. From this point, we must move in on foot."

The detective at the driver's side rolled down the window as Nikolidis consulted his clipboard map with a pencil flash. Bracken suppressed a shiver as the cold night air filled the stuffy interior of the crowded police car. Wedged between Nikolidis on one side and a burly, taciturn police lieutenant on the other, he'd seen little of the passing scenery, even before the driver had doused the lights for the last full hour's drive. He had no idea where they were.

A dark form came gritting over to the car and one of

the detectives swept a pencil beam of light over his cloth-covered steel helmet and cork-blackened face. The soldier who had signaled them with the blue pencil flash spoke rapidly in Greek, and though he couldn't follow it all, Bracken realized they'd rendezvoused with the tough mountain troops Nikolidis had said were meeting them near the monastery. The captain had explained along the way that the soldiers were from a crack Evzone regiment, their rather silly-looking ballet-dancer uniforms traded in, during field exercises, for the pragmatic non-descript working clothes of the twentieth-century fighting man.

Bracken had been in Greece long enough to know that some French ballet dancers had swiped the pleated white skirt and tights of the Greek mountain peasants fighting for independence in the 1830s, rather than the other way around, but when Nikolidis had told him the Evzones were going to be part of the rescue attempt, the ridiculous picture of men charging up a mountain in white tights and pillbox caps had flashed across his fatigue-drugged mind.

Another vehicle skidded to a stop behind them and Nikolidis said, "Let's get out and start the operation. We seem to have everybody in position."

Bracken followed the captain out, his legs cramped by the long ride to . . . "Where *are* we?" Bracken asked.

Nikolidis said, "On a farm road that joins the narrow track the monks once used to haul supplies up to their refuge in the sky, Mr. Bracken. They may be watching the crossroad, so we're moving in at an angle, through the fields and olive groves around the base of Mount Roussanou."

Bracken looked up at the blackness all around and said, "I can't see the mountain, or much of anything else."

Nikolidis nodded and said, "Darkness is vital to our plan. The peak rises like a treestump from thirty-degree talus slopes around its base. Our thrifty peasants have planted olive groves up to more than halfway. Beyond, on the looser shingle, a shoulder-high maquis growth and a few scattered trees will offer cover almost to the base

of the solid core. The chimney itself is not the featureless pillar it appears at a distance. Erosion has carved its flanks deeply, and between the road cuts and spurs of more resistant rock, we should have some cover most of the way."

Bracken patted the bulge in his jacket to make sure it was still there as he frowned and asked, "What do you mean, most of the way? Goddamm it, Nikolidis, it only takes a moment to kill a woman or a child, and—"

"Come now, Mr. Bracken. Did not your General Wolfe take Quebec, back in the 1750s, by scaling a cliff with his troops under cover of darkness?"

"Wolfe wasn't *our* general. He was British, and when you get to the bottom line, General Wolfe was killed in the assault, along with a lot of other people, on both sides!"

"Perhaps, but the attack succeeded, did it not? My point is that the French defenders of Quebec were expecting an attack. These maniacs don't even know we have their hideout located. I would say our chances are very good."

"Very good is not good enough, damm it! I never got to where I am today by taking chances! I'm a man who likes to bet on a sure thing."

Nikolidis snapped a command in Greek before he said, "We take a chance when we are born into this uncertain universe, Mr. Bracken. Come, we're moving in!"

Up on the windswept granite peak, the Sky Riders had struggled into their combat gear and were

trying to assemble their hang-gliders without losing them to the periodic gusts.

Joe Thomas had put on his infrared goggles and was shaking his head, shouting, "I can't see a fucking thing!"

McCabe snapped, "You have to turn on your power-pack, you jerk. Those goggles are basically a pair of sniperscope lenses, battery-powered."

Joe fumbled with the battery pack strapped to his harness and said, "Hey, wow! Everybody looks like fuzzy green ghosts! I can't make out any background and the gliders ain't there, either! These are weird goggles, man!"

McCabe said, "Warm bodies give off infrared. The spotlight on your glider's rigging will show up like a flashlight beam when you turn it on."

Rudy said, "I tried my spotlight before. The lens got warm, but I saw nothing."

McCabe said, "You're not supposed to, without the goggles. Haven't any of you kids studied light in high-school physics?"

Martin said, "I studied physics, but it didn't take. Visible light peters out to ultra violet at one end of the spectrum and infrared at the other, right?"

"Right. The sniperscope system uses infrared because it's at the lower energy level. Takes more power to amplify ultraviolet."

Joe asked, "How come we can't *see* black light?" and Cora snapped, "Because it's black, you clot!"

McCabe was relieved not to have to give an explanation. He was a little fuzzy on the subject himself.

Ben Miller came over as McCabe was strapping himself into his hang-glider. Martin and Rudy were holding the flapping Dacron kite as steady as they could, but it was fighting them like a skittish mustang, or perhaps a frightened bird.

Ben said, "The wind's still kicking back at us. That's not good."

McCabe asked, "Bad enough to kill me?" and Ben said, soberly, "I guess you'll find out soon enough."

McCabe tapped the walkie-talkie strapped to his control bar and said, "I won't be able to talk into this thing,

once I'm in. Two taps on the mike will mean I've landed. Three taps will be your signal to follow me."

"What does no taps mean?"

"That I'm dead, of course. Wait fifteen minutes, and if I don't make it, you kids are on your own."

Ben said, "If they nail you, I'm calling it off, McCabe. We'll give you fifteen minutes to scout ahead, and then, well, I'm taking my people down the way we came."

McCabe nodded and said, "Fair enough. You'd better step back. The wind seems to be letting up and . . . yeah, this is it! Let's go, guys! I'm kicking off!"

McCabe started running for the edge, the clumsy canopy flapping wildly as Martin and Rudy followed partway to the edge, steadying the wing tubes. McCabe's night-vision goggles were on now, but the world ahead of him was a black void as he felt himself running in thin air. He eased back on the bar to drop his noseplate. The flapping Dacron filled the sky, and from a clumsy mass of tubing, wire, and rag, the Rogallo wing became a graceful soaring night bird.

Ben had suggested the best route, or, rather, the route they had to take to keep from dropping below the level of Mount Roussanou as they glided over to it. Cutting straight across the flat fields between the peaks was out. Night air settles down on farmland as it cools. The thermal pattern was almost reversed after sunset, but with any luck, there should still be rising currents near the steep face of the plateau to the north. Ben had warned him not to drift over the trees and maquis atop the plateau, lest he be caught in downdraft. On the other hand, another countercurrent would be going *down* the cliffs a few hundred yards south. He had to catch the curl of the wind against the plateau in the narrow zone it was rising. In other words, he had to nearly graze the rocks with his right wingtip, if he allowed himself to drop below the level of the rim.

A sudden backwind shook his glider, tossing him like a lost autumn leaf across the dark damp sky. McCabe dropped his nose to buck the current, not too sure, at the moment, where he was.

And then the beam of his infrared searchlight picked

up the ghostly form of what seemed to be a huge stone wall ahead, and he realized he was *too low!* He was headed for the jagged rocks of a cliff, and if it was the cliff he thought it was, his rescue attempt was going to end in a dull thump on the valley floor. He had to reach for some sky, fast.

Fighting his instinctive aversion to crashing headlong into cliffs, McCabe deliberately picked up speed as the rocks came out of the night to meet his noseplate. At the last moment, he swung his noseplate to the left and crabbed sideways toward the cliff. His right wing tube pinged against something solid, and then, as he'd hoped, the updraft had him and he was rising. He banked off to put some space between his wingtip and the rocks racing by and, as he swung out to a reasonable distance, found himself slowly sinking again. He swore and moved in closer to the rocks. It was heads you win, tails I lose. He had a choice between landing short of the target or catching a wingtip on a jutting spur and ground-looping into the cliff at forty miles an hour. With no bumper. Plastering yourself against the side of a cliff, four or five hundred feet up, would not be something anyone would ever do twice.

His searchlight picked out the spur in front of him just in time for McCabe to raise his noseplate. His booted feet crashed into the jutting rock and he kicked himself up and over, catching an updraft on the other side and riding it as steeply as he dared. A branch of a fig tree growing in a crack along the cliff whipped his thighs savagely as he skimmed by, and then, miraculously, he was above the rim rocks and still rising.

McCabe rode the updraft as high as he dared, teetering like a tightrope walker along the invisible top of the curl until he'd estimated his probable position. His years of flying under radar into many a midnight rendezvous helped a bit. He swung his searchlight beam out to the south, but the gap between the plateau and Mount Roussanou was too great for the low-energy infrared rays. He'd have to take it on faith that he was banking left at the right angle.

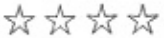
The glider was losing altitude at an alarming rate as

it crossed the tree-covered flats below. McCabe horsed the control bar like a kid pulling a kite string, trying to nurse every inch of lift out of the Dacron wings above his head. He was too low. He knew he was too low. It was the story of his fucking life. He'd never been able to pull off anything really important. He was good at balling chicks and ducking cops, but Ellen had been right when she'd said she was leaving with the baby. He was just a goddam loser and . . .

The infrared beam picked up a faint outline of ghostly rooftops, just ahead, and McCabe grinned wolfishly. He was a little off course to the right, but well above the level of the monastery. Things were looking up!

He swung his noseplate left, aiming for a shrub-covered mass of rock that rose above the rooftops, forming the very peak of the monastery area. As he sailed over the layout, he lost sight of the tile roofs beneath his dangling feet. The glider wobbled as the tricky air currents over the nearly flat-topped mountain hit it. McCabe stalled, using his wing as a parachute, as the rocks came up to meet him.

He slammed down hard, skinning one knee as the wind tried to drag him back into the sky before he could collapse his hang-glider. He flopped it on its back, saving it, and rolled a loose boulder over the nose to hold it flat against the ground. He repeated the process at each wingtip as he strained his ears for any sign his approach had been detected. There was silence, save for the keening of the wind between the chimney tops and roof tiles down the slope. He crouched in the dark like a cat, getting his bearings and catching his breath. Then he unfastened his walkie-talkie and tapped the transmitter, thinking to himself, "I'm going to look like a real clown if I invite the other kids to my party and nobody comes!"



Stephanos Kanalias and his fellow scouts moved slowly up through the trees at the sloping base of Mount Roussanou. Like his comrades, Stephanos was an Evzone, and everyone knew the Greek Evzones were the toughest outfit in the world. At the moment, Sergeant Kanalias was having a hard time remembering this. His mouth was dry and tasted like the bottom of a bird cage. It wasn't enough that they wanted him to risk his behind against a gang of crazy terrorists. They wanted him to make sure the American captives survived, too. It was against all his training to have to worry about the safety of someone on the other side of the skirmish line.

The young sergeant snapped his metal cricket to signal the others as he spotted a form in the brush up the slope. He eased out to flank it and, as he got closer, made it out as a human form, crouching with a rifle.

He signaled Private Tsounis to join him and whispered, "Sentry. Over there at ten o'clock. We're going to work around above him and see if we can take him alive."

A corporal came crawling up to them and asked what was up. The sergeant pointed out the silent, motionless outline and repeated his orders, adding, "You'd better circle farther up and cover us. Move it out and move it *fast!*"

Sergeant Kanalias waited until he'd given the corporal a lead on him before he started moving up on knees and elbows, the butterflies in his stomach miraculously gone now that he knew what he was doing.

Taking out an outpost was something the Evzones liked to think they were good at.

The sergeant and private got into position, upslope from their quarry, and Kanalias flicked his flashlight on, snapping, "Freeze!"

And then, even as he saw the "sentry" was a grotesque dummy made of straw, somebody laughed in the darkness up the slope and a silencer-fitted machine gun tap-danced bullets across the two Evzones at the level of a living man's heart.

The soldiers sprawled across the dummy, Private Tsounis' helmet falling from his head and rolling down the slope between the trees. There was an awful moment of silence. Then the real sniper WARA had placed upslope from the decoy dummy came down through the brush-filled darkness to make certain of his kill.

As he approached the two still figures on the forest floor, another light winked on, pinning the WARA sniper against the wall of night in numb surprise as the fallen sergeant's corporal snapped, "Surrender or die! It's up to you!"

The WARA member whirled and tried to flee upslope, thumbing on his walkie-talkie to warn his comrades as he ran. A silencer-fitted army rifle squibbed in the darkness and the running man cartwheeled, dropping the radio unused as he died in midair.

The corporal swept the fallen sniper with his narrow beam. Then, satisfied that Evzones took out outposts very well indeed, he snapped off the beam and went over to the two fallen men.

He asked, "Are you all right, Stephanos?" and the sergeant got to his feet, grimacing as he ran his fingers over the torn dents in his bulletproof flak jacket.

Private Tsounis got up too, muttering, "I lost my damned helmet, playing dead."

Sergeant Kanalias said, "It's down that way. Get it, and next time keep the damned thing strapped!"

He turned to the corporal and said, "Send a runner to that police captain, Nikolidis. Tell him we've cleared Sector Theta. It's safe to move this far up the slope."

Then he turned to stare up at the dark bulking mass

above, and the butterflies came back to flutter around in his guts as he added, "I don't see how we're going to work our way much higher, though."

Ben Miller heard the three taps in his walkie-talkie receiver and shouted above the wind, "That's the signal! The word is Go!"

Joe Thomas said, "I think I just remembered something I forgot to do in camp. I'd better go back down and write a letter to my folks." But then he ran, grinning, off the edge of the cliff.

Martin shouted, "I got the knockout darts, you jerk!" and followed, leaving the edge at almost the same time.

Cora and Rudy followed as Ben called, "Take care!"

Ben ducked under Della's flapping canopy, kissed his girl for luck, and steadied one wingtip as Della ran forward, shouting back, "Hey, I love you, you big jerk!"

Then Ben was alone on the mountaintop, strapping on his own wings. He buckled the harness only lightly, in a hurry to be near Della. He ran forward, treading air as the wings caught a backdraft. Then he had the nose down and was plummeting for the distant cliffs, his infrared beam on Della's dancing kite.

He followed her through a steep bank, veering past an ugly rockslide scar where the air currents rose like smoke from a chimney. That momma of his flew nice, he thought, almost as nice as she made love. Maybe if the two of them lived through this crazy deal, he'd ask her, someday, to make it legal. It sounded like a kinky new way to make it with a chick.

No two people in the team weighed the same, yet the gliders all had the same wing area, save for Ben's and Martin's beefed-up kites. Therefore, the Sky Riders made their individual ways across to Mount Roussanou, each fighting his or her lonely battle with the murderous air currents. Rudy came in with no sweat, landing not far from Jim McCabe's pinned-down glider, after kicking off a few spurs on the way.

Joe Thomas had worse luck. He'd quickly learned, as McCabe had, how close he had to keep to the cliffs to remain airborne. But he caught his feet on the scrub of a mountain shelf and found himself face down under his wings, pinned to a flat step halfway up the plateau.

He swore and struggled out of his harness, grabbing his noseplate and hauling the flapping kite over the steep rocks to the top of the tableland. He found a tear in the wing as he was putting on the kite again, but, what the hell, it didn't seem too bad. Facing toward the monastery, Joe Thomas jumped again. As the wings filled, he heard what sounded like the slow opening of a giant zipper. He didn't look up. He knew what it was. He was a mile up, and his hang-glider was starting to come apart above him.

He caught an updraft and rode it higher, muttering, "What the hey. It smarts as much to fall five hundred feet as it does a mile." The updraft petered out and he was coming down again, fast. He kept his noseplate aimed at the image of the roof tops in his goggles and saw he'd made it, but at one hell of a steep angle of approach. He aimed for the brushy spur they'd selected for their landing zone and tried to stall in. The canopy above him ripped wide open as he sideslipped in. He landed Chinese, Won Wing Low, and the glider crumpled into a twisted ball of broken metal tubes and torn Dacron. Joe's left leg crunched into the rock and folded like an empty rubber boot. He grunted, "Shit!" while trying not to scream. He lay for a long moment in the wreckage, trying to remember where he was and when, in his whole fucking life, he'd felt so much sheer pain. Then Rudy and McCabe were bending over him and Joe croaked, "You wanna see me do it again?"

McCabe whispered, "Are you okay?" and Joe said, "I

broke my fucking leg. I can't fly and I sure can't walk. I knew I should have stayed behind to write that letter."

McCabe tore a strip of fabric from the wrecked kite, and as Rudy held Joe's ankle to apply traction, he splinted the fracture with Joe's stainless-steel control bar, having twisted it from the softer Duralumin yoke.

Cora came in, landing unseen, and ran over to them, asking if Joe had lived through the wipeout. Joe looked up and said, "How are they hanging, Gorgeous? I think I'm alive, but I'll be damned if I can see what good it does me."

Martin came in, collapsing his kite and saying, as he joined the others around Joe's wreck, "That's one motherfucking sky up there! I had to detour around Detroit on the way over! How bad is Joe hurt!"

McCabe got to his feet, and said, "He'll make it. Where are Ben and Della?"

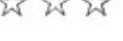
Martin said, "Somewhere over beautiful downtown Burbank, I suppose. You sure picked the night for this shit, Pops!"

Rudy said, "I see them. Their wings are blinking out the stars over there in that clearing in the clouds."

McCabe couldn't see a damned thing without his goggles, but he took Rudy's word for it. He said, "Keep everybody here until Martin and I come back."

Martin blinked, "We're goin' someplace, Pops?"

McCabe said, "Yes—we have to pick off any sentries before we go busting in the doors!"



The picket posted down near the base of the mountain had died before he could use his walkie-talkie.

The silencer-muffled shots had made no more noise than snapping twigs. Yet Number Thirty was concerned as he peered over the parapet, whispering into his own walkie-talkie.

A comrade joined him and asked, "What's wrong?"

The man with the hand-held set said, "Number Twenty-six should have reported in by now. I heard some sounds a while ago. It sounded like someone thrashing about in the underbrush down there."

"Probably a goat."

"You may be right, but I'd better report Number Twenty-six's silence to Number One."

The terrorist telescoped his set's whip antenna and turned from the parapet. Just then something stung him on the shoulder. He muttered, "Damn! I think a bumble-beeee—" and then his legs turned to jelly under him and he fell unconscious at his comrade's feet.

The second WARA member stared down at him, surprised. Then he drew his pistol and turned, peering into the darkness uncertainly.

Martin whispered, "I'm over *here,* turkey " and let fly with another tranquilizer dart.

The terrorist gasped as the dart hit him, trying, as the darkness closed in on his frozen brain, to get off one warning shot. But the trigger was suddenly too stiff to pull and the gun was just too heavy to hold. Martin had another dart ready, but McCabe whispered, "Save it. He's going down."

The guard collapsed in a heap and the two Americans ran forward to disarm them.

The sector of the cliffside parapet they'd been guarding was separated from the main complex by a deep crevass in the mountain top. A not-too-stable-looking bridge spanned the cleft, leading to the main entrance of the monastery. McCabe whispered, "Cover me!" as he crossed the bridge in a low crouch, heading for the massive oak door. Behind him, other members of the rescue team were moving up behind Martin.

The door was blackened with age and studded with wrought-iron bosses. Cautiously, McCabe tested the ancient latch.

It wouldn't budge. The door was locked, and obviously meant to stand up to a battering ram, had the Sky Riders been able to bring one.

Martin joined McCabe, whispering, "Ben's covering us. What's happening, Pops?"

"This mother's locked, and I don't mean mother *dear!*"

"Maybe we could work around to some other way in? They got a zillion old buildings up here and—"

"Ellen and the kids are in this one. We know that from the frescoes in those pictures. Wasserman identified the mural as being on the wall of a chapel, off the main altar of the central church. No other way in. Those goddam monks didn't build this pile to make it easy on their friendly neighborhood burglars."

Martin nodded and suggested, "Why don't we deliver a Candygram?"

McCabe replied, "You got it. Get that slingshot ready."

He waited a moment, then took a deep breath and boldly knocked on the door with his gun muzzle.

A million years went by. Then a voice from the other side asked, *"Qui?"*

McCabe grunted, *"C'est moi! Ouvre la porte!"*

A shaft of light lanced out as the door opened a few inches. From inside, McCabe and Martin were only black outlines. The guard peered out uncertainly and asked, *"Qui est là?"*

Martin shot him in the throat and muttered, "Candygram from Uncle Sam! If you don't like candy, here's some jam!"

The dart-shot guard gagged and tried for an alarm button on the door jamb. McCabe grabbed an arm, yanked him brutally out the door, and pitched him over the side of the bridge into the chasm. He was half asleep when his body thudded wetly to its death.

Ben and the others, having seen what had happened, raced across to join McCabe and Martin in the entrance. Ben muttered, "We're running low on *time!* We've burned away most of the night just getting this far."

Cora added, "It's nearly four. We're lucky we started early. It'll be getting light in a little while, and you said those Greek cops were moving in about now!"

McCabe shot a thoughtful glance at the dim glow on the eastern horizon as he said, "I know what I said, and they might have started early. Let's get Ellen and the kids and split!"

The small band of adventurers moved along the wall of the gaping interior. The nave of the old church had been stripped of furnishings, but painted warrior saints glared down at them from the lofty walls. Their black shadows paced them on the moldering walls. The only illumination was the sputtering lantern the dead guard had placed on a table near the entrance. Something fluttered above their heads and a small gray form flew out a glassless window arch. Another dove cooed from the darkness of some hidden niche, and Della whispered, "The birds are waking up."

McCabe glanced at his wrist and swore. Where had the night gone? It would be getting light by the time they were ready to take off, at the rate they were going!

He ran ahead and slipped around a pillar, stiffening as he heard a faint sound from a dark alcove. He spotted a figure rising sleepily from an open bedroll on the stone floor. The half-awake terrorist was aware of McCabe at the same time. He tried to duck, but McCabe's gun muzzle swung against his skull with a hollow thunk and the man fell back across his bedding as McCabe swung a second time.

Ben Miller hissed, "I'll hogtie him!" and leaped on the fallen man with a length of nylon cord in his free hand. He rolled the limp WARA member over, grabbed a wrist, and stopped what he was doing to mutter dryly. "No problem. He's dead."

Martin joined them, musing. "They sure don't make heads like they used to. My daddy used to whop me harder than that every Saturday night!"

McCabe turned to the others and said, "We're too bunched up. This is an airborne assault, not a teen-age rumble!"

He pointed at Rudy and said, "Rudy, I want you and the girls to cover our retreat. You hold the main entrance. Della, you and Cora go back across the bridge and cover

Rudy from the overgrown fruit orchard on the other side of the drive leading to the bridge."

Then he turned to Ben and Martin and added, "You two stick with me. We've got to hit hard and fast and get our asses out of here. The mothers have a helicopter parked down past the mortuary chapel, and we have to take off while it's still dark!"

The group split up and McCabe led his own team past the crumbled altar and into a dark passageway. He came to a door at one end and tried the latch as Ben and Martin covered him. The door was unlocked and McCabe started to ease it inward, spotting three more WARA members sleeping on the floor in down-filled mummy bags. He moved the door a few more inches before the rusty hinges squealed in protest. One of the terrorists rolled over, half asleep, to fumble for the gun lying at his side. McCabe shoved the door all the way open, ignoring its loud groan, and launched himself like a missile at the half-awake WARA man. Ben and Martin followed as he kicked the terrorist full in the face and jumped with both heels on his solar plexus.

Martin swung his gun like a baseball bat as a second man rose to a sitting position, confused and fighting with the zipper on his sleeping bag. The terrorist's head split like an overripe melon, spilling blood and brains as he literally splashed to the hard stone floor. Ben Miller's victim was a bit more fortunate. He'd probably never recover from the concussion, but he was still breathing when Ben rolled off him, hitting him one last time for luck.

The trio of rescuers moved on, finding a row of monk's cells lining the gloomy second corridor. A door was ajar and McCabe burst in, gun muzzle leveled.

Nothing. The cell was empty. Bedrolls and two mess-kits lay in one corner. The occupants of the cell were up and somewhere else in the complex.

The other cubicles were empty. McCabe found another large door and eased up to it. A tiny beam of light glowed through a peephole cut in the thick planking. McCabe peered through and stiffened. This was *it!*

Ellen and the two children lay behind the far side of

the old chapel cell, sound asleep on some straw. By craning, he could just make out the guard sleeping on a cot, his side of the wire mesh. It appeared, from the outlines under the rough blanket, to be a woman.

He turned to the others and whispered, "Home plate. It seems to be barred from the inside. Cover me."

He dropped to one knee, drawing the trench knife from his boot.

He slid the knife blade between the door jamb and the door handle, feeling for the latch. He felt the iron bar Number Six had dropped in place on the other side and started to ease it up.

Suddenly the sound of laughter echoed through the corridor. Martin whispered, "It's coming from that stairwell!" and pointed to an archway just a few feet back the way they'd come. Ben and Martin eased over to it and listened. From the sounds coming down to them, it was obvious some men on the floor above were waking up and getting ready for breakfast. Someone up there said, "Give me your messkits. I'll go down and see what's on the menu this morning."

Martin grunted, "The mother must have been raised on a farm where they milked the cows early. It's only a little after four!"

Ben hissed, "Quiet!" as they heard the sound of boot heels scraping on the stone steps above them. Both men drew back as Martin readied his sling. The polished boots appeared, followed by the WARA man's shins, thighs, and waist.

Martin let fly, hitting the man on the stairs in the thigh. The terrorist grunted in surprise and descended a few more steps, muttering about fleas and the filth of the old monastery.

He was fully in view now. Ben saw the glazed look in his eyes and hissed, "Grab him! Get those messkits!"

But even as the two of them moved in, the guard's knees buckled and he pitched headlong down the last few steps, messkits clanging to the stone in a cascade of metallic cacophony that would serve to wake the living if not the dead.

Inside the cell where Ellen and the children lay,

Number Six woke up and called out in alarm. Jim McCabe swore and, not trying for the subtle approach, heaved up on the knife in his left hand. The bar popped out of its brackets on the other side and clanged to the floor as Number Six swung her booted feet off the cot. McCabe kicked the door in and followed fast, spotting Number Six as the girl guerrilla fumbled for her carbine. He backhanded Number Six across the cell, into the wire mesh. The would-be amazon came off the wire like a boxer off the ropes, keening like a banshee and full of fight. She threw a really nice right cross at McCabe, who blocked it with his left forearm and countered with a clubbing swing of the gun barrel in his right. The girl went down and stayed there, unconscious.

Ellen and the children were awake by now, though groggy and confused. McCabe sprang over to the gate in the mesh, shoved the gun barrel into the narrow space between the hasp and jamb, and wrenched it open with a snap. Ellen gasped, "My God! Is that *you*, Jim?"

McCabe laughed and said, "Yeah. This looks a lot like our first apartment. Maybe a little better, but, what the hey, I was out of work and . . ."

Jimmy Junior rolled to his feet and came over to McCabe asking, "Did my dad send you, mister?"

McCabe looked down at his son, blinked, and muttered, "Yeah. Your . . . father's been worried about you, Jimbo. How do you feel?"

"I'm all right, sir. They were awfully mean to us, though."

Martin stuck his head in and asked, "You aim to set up housekeeping, Pops? The whole damned place is awake!"

McCabe said, "Let's go, Ellen. We'll talk about old times some other day."

His ex-wife knelt and picked up the sleepy Susie as Jimmy ran over to Martin, asking, "Did my dad send you too, sir?"

"Yeah, kid. Let's you and me take flying lessons! You coming, Pops?" McCabe said, "Get them to the gliders, Marty. You and Ben know what to do." He turned to Ellen and said, "Beat it, babe. You and the

kids go with these guys and do whatever they say, no matter how frantic."

The corridor outside roared to the sound of gunfire and Ben's voice called, "Come on, let's move!"

They rushed out together to find Ben crouched in a haze of gunsmoke with two more terrorists sprawled on the stairs. He snapped, "I just taught them they can't come down this way, but there's more where these bastards came from!"

McCabe said, "Take charge of Ellen and the baby. Martin, hang on to Jimmy and, all of you, run like hell! I'll cover the rear!"

Ben and Martin hauled the three rescued captives back the way they'd come as McCabe brought up the rear, walking backward. As his comrades and the Bracken family reached the doorway, Rudy said, "It's getting lighter," and Martin said, "Yeah, run, don't walk to the nearest exit. Gimme the baby, Miz Bracken!"

Ben scooped Jimmy up and, with Ellen following, the two men ran across the bridge to join Cora and Della. Ben said, "McCabe said not to wait. Everybody to the kites!" and started leading his band up the slope to where the injured Joe and the hang-gliders waited.

McCabe joined Rudy in the doorway as he waited for the others to get clear. Then he said, "Okay, Rudy, move out!"

The Swiss Sky Rider followed the others across the bridge. As he reached the other side, McCabe yelled, "Hit the deck!" and fired at a WARA guard coming around a corner from another part of the grounds.

McCabe's first shot missed, but Rudy dropped, spinning on one knee, and stitched the guard across the chest with an instinctive burst from his own weapon.

Up the slope, Martin handed Susie to one of the girls and said, "I'm getting into this. It sounds like fun!"

Ben followed as the muscular Negro retraced his steps through the tangle of the olive grove. An upstairs window opened and a man leaned out to fire at McCabe and Rudy as they made it across the bridge.

Martin stepped into the open, raised his muzzle, and sprayed the window with automatic fire until Rudy and

McCabe reached cover. Then all four men were moving up to the peak, taking cover between outbuildings, walls, and the orchard trees some thoughtful monk had planted long ago.

Down at the base of the cliffs, Jonas Bracken turned to Nikolidis and gasped, "They're firing on us! We have to move back! We've been spotted!"

Nikolidis shook his head and stepped out into the open on the narrow roadway, saying, "Don't be ridiculous! If they know we are here, there is no point in further skulking. For me, this road leads only in one direction, Mr. Bracken, and that direction is *up!*"

Above them, on the mountaintop, a bitter, confusing gunfight was going on as the Sky Riders fought for their lives through the labyrinth of ruined walls, overgrown garden plots, and jagged outcrops of rock. The terrorists were just as confused as they boiled out of their hiding places like hornets from a kicked-open nest.

Ben Miller's cheek was bleeding from a bullet graze as he popped up from behind a tumbled wall to cut a terrorist in two with a savage burst of gunfire. Martin, covering for Cora as she raced across an open space with little Susie, caught a bullet in his right arm and spun like a ballet dancer behind a boulder. He saw he was still alive and, gritting his teeth, kept fighting. Two charging terrorists went down as Martin's gun kept flashing.

Another terrorist lobbed a grenade at Jim McCabe, who dove over a ruined wall as it bounced off and exploded. He popped up as the last grenade shard were still falling and nailed the man who'd thrown it, shouting, "Come on, let's move! Everybody off the mountain!"

Ellen, the children, and the two Sky Rider girls had made it to Joe Thomas and the gliders by now. Behind them, a man's voice snapped, "Halt!" and they turned to see a masked terrorist rising from some scrub with his machine pistol trained on them. He seemed to be aiming at Ellen and the children as he raised his muzzle, snarling, "Parasites on the People of the World!"

Then the top of his head exploded in a cloud of bloody froth and McCabe stepped into view, lowering the smoking muzzle of his own weapon. Behind him,

Ben supported Rudy as they staggered toward the gliders. Cora called, "What happened? Is he hurt?" and Rudy gritted, "Flesh wound. I'm all right."

Ben Miller didn't comment. Rudy's blood was spattered all over the two of them. Cora rushed to Rudy's aid as Della took his weapon from him and moved back to join Martin behind another boulder, covering the retreat.

McCabe dropped to one knee by Joe and asked, "What's with the leg? Can you still fly?"

"I could if I had wings, but all I've got is shit!"

"Use mine. Wait until the others lift Ellen and the kids out of here, then make like a big-ass bird!"

"I'll cover, but where will you be, and how do you expect to get off this rockpile?"

"Those creeps have a helicopter, down on the far side of the monastery. I'm going to make a grab for it. Can't take the chance of them following you kiddies with the chopper. I can fly the thing, if I can reach it and—"

"Hey, back up, you said the chopper was parked on the other side of those frantic mothers!"

"Yeah, so?"

"So you have to be out of your gourd! You can't fight your way through a whole damned wolfpack!"

"I can try. I'll see you around the campus, Joe."

He stood up and turned to Ben, saying, "You're in command, Ben. I'm going down to relieve Martin and Della. As soon as they get back up here, start throwing people off the mountain!"

Little Jimmy was staring in wonder as Cora helped Rudy into his harness. Ellen stood with Susie in her arms and growing fear in her eyes. McCabe touched her lightly on the shoulder and said, "You'll be taking off with Martin. His big kite will lift the two of you. Give Susie to Cora and let Jimmy go with Della."

Ellen gasped, "Jim, I just can't do it! I'm afraid of heights!"

"Not as afraid as you are of bullets. Just do as Martin says and you'll make it. He's used to hauling dead weight through the sky."

He shot a long last look at Ellen and his son. Then

he grinned and said, "Someday, when we're old and gray, we'll look back on this and laugh."

"Jim, there's so much I don't understand about you . . ."

But McCabe wasn't listening. He ran down to Della and Martin and snapped, "Move out. Ben knows the way home."

Neither of them argued. Martin said, "Let's go, Della!" and, as McCabe covered for them, led the girl up the slope.

McCabe put another clip in his gun and sprayed the trees and ruins for luck. There was little return fire, and, reloading, he started working his way around to one side. He had no idea how many terrorists were between him and the helicopter, but they hadn't stopped him yet. He couldn't let them stop him now.

It was nearly daylight now, and getting to the chopper unseen would be a problem. He was forced to break cover as he ran across an open space and dove headfirst over a waist-high wall. He found himself in a small olive grove and wondered why they hadn't fired.

He worked his way to the wall of a low building, and then, in the distance, he heard the rattle of small-arms fire. It was coming from the other side of the complex, and McCabe grinned as he muttered, "Good old Nikolidis!"

Obviously the Greek police and their army allies were attacking up from the slopes below. Had Nikolidis started a few minutes earlier, Ellen and the kids would have died, but now that they were out of that cell, the captain's attack was a welcome diversion. The terrorists, caught in the middle, were pouring most of their fire down on the Greek rescue force.

McCabe grabbed a tree branch, hauled himself up to the tile rooftop, and ran across the top of the building, ancient tiles cracking under his heels.

Back at the takeoff point, Ben Miller shouted, "That's it, Ellen! Run with Martin! Run like your life depends on it!"

Ellen screamed, clinging to Martin's waist as their feet

left the mountain, and the black youth yelled, "That's it, honey! Just close your eyes and hang on!"

The hang-glider dove over the edge, caught the sky in its Dacron wings, and they were airborne. Martin dipped the nose to pick up speed as he soothed, "Not to worry. You're strapped to me and couldn't fall if you tried. Just hang loose and Malibu Marty will fly you to the prince's ball!"

He tried to bank and pain lanced up his arm. Jesus, that goddam bullet in his right arm hurt! He'd have to hold her steady and hope for the best. Try anything tricky with that bum arm and they'd wipe out for sure!

Meanwhile, Della took off with Jimmy riding piggy-back, tied for safety with a length of nylon cord. The boy yelled, "Wow!" as they went over the edge. Della laughed and said, "Just think of me as Glinda, the Good Witch of the North! How do you like my broomstick, Jimmy?"

"I like it a lot! I never flew before! It's *fun!*"

Behind them, little Susie asked, "Where's my momma?" as Cora picked her up, secured by a length of line to the control bar of her hang-glider. Cora said, "I'm taking you to her, honey. Just hang on to Aunt Cora and we'll go for a ride."

Susie looked up at the flapping black canopy above them and asked, "Is this an airy plane, Aunt Cora?"

Cora said, "Close enough, hon."

Then Ben shouted, "Go!" and they were taking off into the morning breeze. Susie looked down and said, "We sure are high, Aunt Cora."

"Are you frightened, honey?"

"Not if you don't drop me. I dropped my dolly, once, and it got all broken!"

Behind them, Ben turned to Joe and Rudy, saying, "You're next, Joe. I'll help you to the edge and we'll strap you in."

Joe protested, "I told McCabe I'd cover for him."

Ben said, "Come on, damm it. You can't take off without help. I'm pitching you and Rudy over the side before I leave. I'm not being a hero. You assholes have

to learn to stay in shape if you expect to play Gary Cooper!"

Down below them, Bracken aimed and fired, blowing the sniper off the side of the cliff. The body bounced a couple of times before it wedged in a rock cleft and hung there limply.

Nikolidis crouched behind a bullet-spattered boulder, cursing. Bracken joined him and said, "It's no use. It's suicide to move up any farther. Thanks to you, my wife and children are probably dead by now!"

One of the others and both men looked up. A triangular black dot was moving across the sky, followed closely by another in the morning light. Nikolidis muttered, "What in the devil . . . ?" as Bracken shouted, "Hang-gliders! Remember what McCabe said about growing wings? The crazy bastard's done it! Come on! What are you waiting for?"

He started forward, but Nikolidis grabbed his arm, snapping, "Down, you fool! You were right before. We can't go higher!"

But Bracken laughed wildly and shouted, "Screw what I said before! Somehow, Jim's gotten in and now he's trying to fly them out. We've got to cover them. If we can't go up the road, we'll just have to scale the goddam cliffs!"

Nikolidis nodded, turned to the nearest soldier, and yelled in Greek, "Every man for himself! Work your way up any way you can. Don't shoot at those gliders, but anything else is a fair target!"

Although it appeared a solid mass from any distance, Mount Roussanou was cleft and eroded like a

rotting gigantic treestump. From his command post in the main building, Number One directed his scattered men by radio commands, dispatching them to new positions on the crumbling mass of limestone as the confusing battle seemed to warrant. Some he sent to certain doom on lower shelves from which, if the top was overrun, there would be no escape. It was very important that the mountaintop be held, though as his head began to throb again, it was difficult to remember just why.

His walkie-talkie crackled and a desperate voice said, "Number Thirty-two calling Number One. We have the recoiless 75 mounted. What are your orders? Over."

Number One frowned. What were they talking about? Oh, yes, the little cannon, mounted on that stolen jeep. He thumbed his transmitting button and said, "Drive down the road until it winds around to the south face, a third of the way down. They won't be able to hit you with fire from below. The road shoulder will protect you from view as well as gunfire. Set up a roadblock down there. Then see if you can bring down one of those accursed kites with the artillery piece! Over."

Another member of his trapped band reported in, saying, "The last of them has just taken off. We tried to shoot him out of the sky, but those kites are difficult targets. Someone's taught them evasive flying tactics. If they'd only fly straight out for the valley floor, we'd hit them with no trouble. But they keep circling the mountain like Indians around a wagon train. They're trying to get down to the Greek rescue party in a barber-pole glide, hugging the mountainside and only giving us a few quick wing shots as they whip past. I think if I could make my way out on this spur . . ."

But Number One wasn't listening. He'd dropped the walkie-talkie to hold his head with both hands. His head was splitting and everything was falling apart around him. His army was trapped. His captives were getting away. What was a man of destiny to do?

"The helicopter!" he suddenly gasped, the migraine fading as the cocaine he'd taken earlier began to take effect. He started running down a passageway, making for the burial plot where his camouflaged helicopter was ready

and waiting. He'd take off with Marcel, use the .50-caliber to blast the hang-gliders out of the sky or strafe them on the ground. Perhaps, if there were not too many Greek soldiers down below, he'd be able to blast a way out for his surviving followers. If not, well . . . at least *he* would get away.

A bullet spanged through the taut canopy over his head and Martin's arm hurt like hell as he banked the big Rogallo. Ellen screamed above the roar of the wind, "You're taking us *back* to that awful place!"

Martin answered, "We got to move back *under* them guns on that goddam mountaintop, Momma. Out here in the open, we're offering them a clean shot at our tails."

Another bullet whizzed past, singing like a deadly bee, and then Martin had them past the spur of rock the sniper with the telescopic sight was using as his anti-aircraft perch. Martin spotted another glider ahead of them, hugging the cliffside as it fought the morning updrafts, and muttered, "I think that's Della and your boy. She's in the same fix we're in. If she swings out into quiet gliding air, them mothers up above will pepper her. If she hangs in close like this, the damned updrafts figure to keep her airborne forever while she merry-go-rounds this effing pile of rock!"

They whipped past a section of the roadway, carved from the mountainside, and some terrorists in a jeep started shooting at them. Both the jeep and Martin's kite were moving, and the single burst of fire went wild. Then

Martin and Ellen were around the curve of the cliff and he grunted, "See what I mean? We're going down, sort of, but we figure to circle this damned mountain six or eight times before we make it to them treetops down below."

Ellen looked down, trying not to gag, as the tangled vegetation of the talus slope seemed to spin beneath her dangling feet like a huge olive-green phonograph record. They passed another sniper who'd worked his way down a crevass, and as the terrorist took a wing shot at them, Martin said, "Now, that's just about enough of this shit! You see that pistol on my hip, honey? It's by your right thigh. You don't need to hang on to me with both hands. See if you can pull it out from between us."

Ellen slid her right hand down the man's side and felt the hard cold steel and plastic of the .45. She gripped the holstered gun, asking, "What do you want me to do?"

"Attagirl. Now, listen. You draw the piece and, for God's sake, don't drop it, see? You got it out?"

"Yes, but I don't know if I can shoot it."

"Anyone can shoot a gun. Hitting anything with it is another story, but never mind. There's a little lever doohicky by your thumb, if you're holding it cowboy-style. You feel it?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Good. It's the safety catch. Snick it down and, whatever you do, keep the muzzle pointed away from my black ass!"

Ellen did as she was told and asked, "What now?"

Martin said, "First of all, make sure you keep a tight grip. Old .45 kicks like a mule, but you can dig it. You just keep your grip tight and your wrist loose. Let her buck and don't fight it, see?"

"What am I supposed to shoot at?"

"The next mother that shoots at *us*, of course."

"Martin, I don't think I could hit the broad side of a barn if I was standing inside of one!"

"Well, shit, Momma, you know that and I know that, but if you blast that old .45 in some dude's face as he aims his rifle at us, *he* may not know that, you dig?"

Ellen laughed, a trifle hysterically, and aimed the heavy gun out at the rocks whipping past their right wingtip.

☆☆☆☆

Joe Thomas stared down at the treetops half a mile below, trying to spot a clearing to slide into without breaking the other leg. He had to hug the mountainside. There were miles and miles of open fields just out a little ways, but every time he left the meager cover of the cliffs, some mother up above started peppering him with long-range plunging fire.

He recognized a spur of rock jutting out of the main mass, just ahead, and marveled, "Jesus, have I gone all the way around this pile of shit already?"

He'd drawn fire from up there the last time he'd whipped past. He hooked his right elbow over the control bar, holding his cocked automatic lined up with his nose-plate as the glider closed the distance.

A party of terrorists were waiting for him, as he'd expected, and they had to show their heads and shoulders against the gray morning sky as they aimed down at him from the rim rocks. Joe suddenly raised his nose, nearly stalling, as he fired up at the would-be snipers. His kite bucked wildly as the recoil slammed his elbow against the control bar, and the heads began to vanish like clay pipes lined up in a shooting gallery. One man, farthest out, rolled off the spur and fell end over end to the trees below as Joe swerved to miss his falling body. And then he was around the bulge of the cliff. He spotted Della's kite, coming the other way, and shouted up at her, "Hey, baby, long time no see!"

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Number One was climbing into the helicopter as his pilot switched on the ignition. The rotor began to turn, slowly picking up speed, as Jim McCabe came whipping around a corner of the nearby buildings, submachine gun in hand. McCabe and Number One opened fire at the same time. McCabe aimed at the chopper's engine, and Number One, of course, aimed at McCabe.

A heavy slug slammed into McCabe's thigh, just below the hip joint. The force of the blow knocked him off his feet and backward into a drainage ditch along one side of the plot. He lay there stunned as he wondered numbly where his submachine gun could have gone and why the chopper's engine was still revving up.

Numbed by hydrostatic shock, McCabe groped for his holstered .45 and rolled over to raise a cautious head from the dry litter of the ditch. His machine gun was lying out in the open on the grass. The chopper's rotor was up to lift-off spin and Number One was inside the roaring mother!

Gritting his teeth, McCabe staggered to his feet and ran forward, ignoring the pain in his thigh. He tried to fire, but the goddam chamber was empty. He kept going, using both hands to pump a round in place. The skids of the chopper were leaving the ground. There wasn't time to get off a well-aimed shot. There wasn't time to think. Instinctively, McCabe threw himself face down across the landing skids. The chopper kept rising. They were taking off with McCabe clinging to the undercarriage.

The terrorists' jeep skidded to a stop at a place where the road cut wound into a natural amphitheater in the steep cliffs. The girl called Number Six had recovered from McCabe's blow and was with the two other WARA men as they swung the recoilless field piece mounted on a center post to cover the downhill bend of the road.

A glider whipped past, and Number Six snarled, raising her machine gun too late to try for a shot. She got out and knelt by the rear of the vehicle, ready to blast the next idiot that came skimming down from above.

She hadn't long to wait. Two hang-gliders came in view at once, riding the thermals along the mountainside a few yards above the road's outer shoulder.

Cora and little Susie were hanging from one of the kites, with Rudy slightly higher and inside them as they banked around the curve of the rock-studded cliff. Rudy was weak from loss of blood, and the sky in front of him was filled with spinning stars. But he spotted the jeep in time to yell a warning, and Cora, seeing the danger at the same time, tried to veer out of range as Number Six opened up on her.

Cursing, Rudy yanked the bolt back on his submachine gun and dove for the trio shooting from in and around the jeep. Number Six swung her muzzle at the onrushing hang-glider as Rudy opened fire.

Rudy gasped in pain as a bullet took him under the heart, but kept his own muzzle blazing as he lanced down

at the jeep under his riddled glider wings. His vision was going and he never saw the way Number Six died, pinned against the rear of the jeep by his savage machine-gun burst as he kept coming, dying fingers gripping the red-hot gun to the end. The gas tanks behind the bloody tatters of the WARA girl's body exploded as the bullets plowed through them. The jeep was enveloped in a big balloon of orange flame as the kite kept coming, like a moth attracted to a candle, a dead man gripping the control bar. One of the terrorists jumped clear as his comrade rolled across the hood in agony, his clothes on fire. Then the twenty-foot keel-tube of Rudy's glider stabbed through the burning fuel and the steel tip slammed into the detonator on one of the shells racked to a wheel well.

Down below, the Greek rescue party winced at the horrendous roar above them and looked up to see rocks, wheels, and at least one flaming human body exploding out from the mountainside above their heads. They scrambled for cover as the shower of hot metal and shattered rock cascaded down the mountain.

A triangular dot veered away from the mountain, and high in the sky, Martin told Ellen Bracken, "We're low enough to cut this foolishness. I'm putting us down on the first clear spot I can find!"

The control bar shuddered in his hands as the canopy throbbed to a drumming sound from above. Martin couldn't look directly up through the Dacron wings, but he didn't have to. He knew the sound of a helicopter when he heard one. Martin muttered, "Shit, this ain't no place to be making like a big-ass bird! Hang on, Momma, we're going *down!*"

Meanwhile, Cora was in trouble. The burst of fire as they'd passed the unexpected jeep had sheared a flying wire from the king post and bent a wing tube. The canopy was ripped by bullets, and she was losing altitude fast.

She spotted Ben Miller just ahead, and her steeper dive was catching up with him. She shouted, "Ben! I can't make it! I'm trying for a trapeze transfer!"

Ben looked back, startled, as Cora sideslipped toward him. Cora was already lowering the screaming Susie like a yo-yo on the length of nylon line.

The little girl was hysterical with sheer terror as Cora swung her like a pendulum, but neither Ben nor Cora had the time to reassure her as Ben, catching on, dove faster to match the speed of Cora's crippled kite. Cora swung Susie over toward his outstretched left hand as he controlled with his right on the bar. He missed on the first try and Susie receded, screaming blue murder.

Cora swung her all the way out, with all the strength in her long amazonian arm. Then, as the terrified child swung in again, Ben caught her by one ankle and held on.

Cora let go her end of the line as Ben struggled to haul Susie to the safety of the bar in front of him. The little girl wrapped both arms around his neck, buried her face in his chest, and whimpered, "She dropped me! Aunt Cora *promised,* and she *dropped* me!"

Ben didn't try to do more than cling to her. He had no way of lashing her on, and with one hand on the bar, this had to be it. He spotted a clearing, down and to his right, and banked for it. He'd have to land on his feet and hang on to the baby. They'd just have to take their chances with that chopper he kept hearing up above.

Above and behind them, Cora muttered, "Shit!" as the wind tube buckled further under her weight. She tried to hold her glider, but it was sliding sideways in a flat spin, whirling like a frisbee. Cora was completely out of control and fighting not to black out as the world flashed past her in a dizzy whirl. She tried to remember how you recovered from a spin. Did she want her noseplate up or down? Down seemed suicidal, but she wasn't getting anywhere by trying to get it up. Dazed, she pulled back on the bar. The spin slowed down as she saw the trees coming up to meet her. She was diving nearly straight down. Desperately, she shoved the bar forward with all her strength. At the last possible minute, her kite pulled out of the dive, carried her a hundred yards at treetop level, and folded its wings up like a butterfly above her head. She smashed into a grove of pine trees, smashed through trunks and branches in a tangle of wreckage and pine boughs, and came to rest, unconscious, hanging above the ground from her harness with one arm bent at an unnatural angle.

She was still breathing, but she didn't know it.

Martin was about to land with Ellen. The clearing ahead looked good, and as he circled to come in against the wind, some uniformed men broke cover and waved at them. Martin grinned and said, "This must be the place!"

An updraft caught them, lifting the glider too high for their first approach. Somewhere above, the rotor blades of the unseen chopper seemed to be coming closer.

Actually, now there were two helicopters aloft. At first light, Captain Nikolidis had ordered an army chopper into action. It was up and searching for Number One's machine, but, unfortunately for Martin and Ellen, the rescue chopper was on the far side of the mountain, spraying the surviving members of WARA with its own machine-gun fire.

Number One spotted Martin trying to land, and pointed at his hang-glider, snapping, "After them! Don't let them get away!"

His pilot protested, "We have to get away! We're only a little faster than that army chopper we spotted just before we ducked below the cliff tops, and unless we take advantage of our lead, they'll shoot us down!"

But Number One wasn't in a mood for sober discussion. His brave new world had fallen apart all around him, and worse than that, his enemies had made him look ridiculous with their childish flying toys.

He shouted above the engine's roar, "That glider's carrying Ellen Bracken! That damned Negro's about to deliver her, safe and unharmed, to her bloated capitalistic husband! I told Bracken I'd kill them all if he refused to obey my every command! I mean to keep my promise!"

He leaned out the opening on his own side, pointing the submachine gun he held down at the small triangular dot skimming over the treetops, and repeated his command, saying, "Down! Down, I say! I intend to blast them out of the sky and leave her riddled body in the woods for her treacherous husband to find! Jonas Bracken must learn, as others have learned, what it means to doublecross a man of destiny!"

Clinging to the undercarriage, unseen by the two men inside the helicopter, Jim McCabe had braced himself between two struts and was hanging on desperately. He felt

himself swinging across the sky as the chopper banked steeply, and looking down, he spotted Martin's kite.

It was coming in for a landing, but McCabe knew, as the skids he clung to lined up on it, that the idiots above him in that nice warm cabin were diving to intercept Martin. Martin and . . . Ellen.

"Land!" he gasped, as Martin seemed to tool along forever with his approach. McCabe knew Martin was actually putting them down as swiftly as he dared, but a hang-glider's slow gliding speed made them seem almost motionless as the helicopter roared down to the attack. Martin's speed would be about twenty-five knots. This madman's chopper could do well over a hundred. Martin and Ellen didn't have a chance. Even if they touched down before the chopper was in range, Number One could strafe them on the gound at his leisure.

He groaned in frustration as he tried to think of something, anything, he could do to stop the maniac just above his head.

There was another throbbing sound in the distance and McCabe glanced back. The Greek army chopper had circled the mountain after putting the few cliffdwelling terrorists remaining out of business.

McCabe grinned as he saw the men in the other chopper had spotted Number One's. He shouted joyfully, "Come *on,* you guys! You can do it, if you'll only get the lead out!"

Then he frowned and asked himself, "What are *you* grinning about, you jerk-off? Where does it leave *you* if that other chopper wastes *this* one?"

He swung around to see how Martin was making out. Another glider had joined Martin. McCabe had no way of knowing it, but Ben and Susie had swung in beside Martin's kite, and as the two pilots eased down through the contrary mountain winds, mother and daughter were waving happily to one another.

Ellen yelled over to Ben, "Where's my Jimmy?"

Ben called out, "He and Della made it. They crashed in some trees, but they're okay. I saw Della waving as I passed over just now."

Martin heard the throbbing rotors of the diving chopper

and shouted, "Scatter! We got company!" as he banked steeply to one side.

Ben swung the other way, treetops clipping just below his hanging boot heels. He realized, even as he did so, that they'd made a dumb move in their instinctive panic. He felt for a thermal, intending to rise just enough to spot another clearing, any other clearing, to drop into.

Above them, Jim McCabe groaned as he saw what a dumb thing they'd done. Leaning out from the cabin over Jim's head, Number One had seen it, too, and his voice was gloating as he screamed, "The mother! Forget the second one and line me up on that Negro and the mother!" McCabe looked back. The army chopper was trying. But trying wasn't good enough. They just didn't have the speed to catch these bastards.

The skids he clung to were skimming in low above the treetops now, and Martin's kite was dead ahead. From his low position on the WARA chopper, McCabe could see the outlines of Martin and his ex-wife.

Martin looked back, spotted the chopper on his tail, and sideslipped. The terrorist pilot made a slight correction, lining up again on Martin as the distance closed.

Martin tried again, zooming up and stalling to chandelle out of the way. McCabe groaned, "No way, Marty! No way in hell you'll shake these bastards off you tail!"

He drew his pistol, sighed, and said, "I guess it's up to me."

He raised the muzzle against the metal bottom of the cabin, said, "Goodbye, Ellen. Have a nice life. I only wish . . . aw, what the hell . . ." and pulled the trigger.

He fired the whole clip, aiming blindly for the pilot's position above him. The roar of his automatic was almost matched by the scream of tortured metal as the heavy slugs tore up through fuel lines, control wires, and human flesh. The slipstream spattered McCabe's gun hand with hot fluid from a ruptured oil line as his .45 ran out of ammo, but for a moment nothing else seemed to be happening.

Tucking his gun barrel under an armpit, McCabe started fishing for another clip.

Inside the cabin, it was a different story. Marcel, the pilot, hung by his seat harness with one arm and shoulder

hanging out the opening on his side. Three rounds had ripped up through his guts and into his heart and lungs. Blood streamed along the metal side of the chopper as the wind whipped at his long hair.

In panic, Number One had grabbed the dual controls, thinking he'd been hit by fire from the ground. His teeth bared, eyes glazed with hate, Number One peered through the Plexiglas windscreen for some sign of Martin's hang-glider. If he couldn't shoot them down, he'd chop them to bits with his whirling blades.

But the blades were no longer whirling as they had been. The engine behind him gave a few last gasping sputters and died, its fuel lines ruptured. Slowly, like a top winding down, the terrorist's chopper began to dead-rotor down to the forest.

"This is not just!" Number One whimpered, pounding with his fist on the unresponsive instrument panel. Numbly, he somehow held this machine steady as, ahead of him, Ben and Martin dropped out of sight between the treetops, and, behind him, the army helicopter roared in for the kill.

Down in the undercarriage, McCabe looked back and shouted, "Hey! Not *now*, you silly sonsabitches!"

A treetop snatched at his hanging foot. McCabe glanced down, saw they were coming down in a rocky clearing, and muttered, "This is where I get off!"

He swung down, clinging to a skid with both hands, and let go as the chopper was eight or ten feet from the ground. The forward motion rolled him along the rocky surface, bruising him still further, but not as much as he deserved, he thought, as he sprawled spread-eagled across a flat boulder, wondering why he was still alive.

The chopper landed fifty yards away, its still-spinning machinery chewing itself apart for lack of lubrication. McCabe rolled off the rock and reloaded his .45, rising cautiously to view the downed WARA machine.

Its rotor stopped with a last dying quiver and it just sat there for a time, like a big dead vulture.

Then Number One exploded out the side, screaming incoherent curses at a world he'd never made, a world

he'd never been able to fit his tortured soul in to, no matter how he tried, no matter how many great dreams he'd had.

His mask was off and his misshapen face was foamed with mad-dog rage. He saw McCabe and drew his pistol, neither knowing nor caring just who the battered American might be.

McCabe said, "Not if I can help it, friend!" and swung his own gun up. He pulled the trigger. Nothing. The goddam .45 was jammed from bouncing across the rocks.

Number One saw his enemy was powerless and, gloating, came closer to make sure of his victim, holding his own ready pistol out in both hands for a point-blank close-range shot.

McCabe glanced around for cover, saw there wasn't any, and faced his tormentor with a weary smile, staring unwinkingly into the cold steel eye of the terrorist's weapon. Number One was taking his time, obviously savoring the moment of power.

McCabe taunted, "What are you waiting for? How many times do you expect a guy to die in one day?"

"Sal cochon!" the terrorist screamed triumphantly.

"Yeah, yeah, get it over with, you silly bastard!"

Then both men winced as the air around them throbbed with the roar of a diving helicopter. McCabe had almost forgotten the army chopper, but as he spotted its shadow skimming over the rocks to his right, he threw himself flat and to one side.

Number One fired, putting a round through the space McCabe's heart had just occupied. And then, as someone in the overhead chopper opened up with a submachine gun, the terrorist forgot McCabe to aim his weapon up at the avenging army machine in a futile attempt to shoot it down.

A line of machine-gun slugs tap-danced past McCabe's prone form, spattering him with shattered rock as Number One screamed and tried to turn and run. The hail of bullets stitched him up one side and slammed him violently to the earth and rolled him across the rocks.

And then the army chopper had passed over and was spinning on its center of gravity, facing McCabe and the

downed terrorist as it came in for a landing in a blast of sound and wind.

McCabe got to his feet and took a few steps toward Number One, ignoring the wet warmth running down one leg. The flesh wound in his thigh would be stiff as hell in an hour, he knew, but McCabe was a man who pushed machinery, women, and his own body as far as he could get them to go.

McCabe bent over to pick up the WARA leader's gun. The terrorist's blood-flecked hand was creeping slowly toward the weapon, like a crushed pink crab. McCabe got the gun and muttered, "For Chrissake, are you still *alive?*"

Number One's face was pressed to the gray rock as he gasped, "But this is not just! They cannot do this! Not to *me!*"

McCabe's face softened a trifle as he stared down at the insane young man dying at his feet. It was his first good look at the paranoid, and McCabe thought, "Hell, he was just a kid! An ugly, hopped-up punk!"

The dying youth's lips were covered with bloody froth as he moaned, "When the masses of the People of the World are organized, there shall be no stopping them! You tools and lackeys of authority will never stop us! Anarchy shall prevail! All governments will be forced to dispatch soldiers to every prison, bank, industrial plant, in a vain attempt to restore order."

Number One coughed and gasped, "It won't be any use. Your world will dissolve in maximum entropy. Transportation, communication, and all social organization will collapse. Your capitalist world shall be replaced by one in which . . ."

His groping fingers touched McCabe's boot. As the American shuddered and drew back, the crawling hand fluttered, balled into a fist, and slowly relaxed in death.

McCabe's voice was curiously gentle as he muttered, "If any of it ever happens that way, kid, you're better off dead. You never had what it would take to live in your jungle dreamworld."

Footsteps crunched on gravel, and McCabe looked up to see a familiar figure walking from the army chopper.

Nikolidis still cradled the submachine gun in one arm, and when McCabe asked, "What the hell were *you* doing up in my sky?" the Greek said, "Crop-dusting. This part of my country was badly infested with vermin!"

He stopped to nudge the fallen terrorist with a thoughtful toe and McCabe said, "He's dead. You weren't just screwing around with that tommygun, were you?"

Nikolidis shrugged and said, "This . . . bastard got off much too easy. Some few of his friends may live to stand trial. Our Evzones have not rounded up many of them alive. We Greeks are reasonable people, but . . ."

"What about *my* people? I was too busy to keep track of the others on the way down."

"So I just observed. Do you always shoot down helicopters while you happen to be a passenger? You know, of course, that you are utterly insane, don't you?"

"That's what everybody keeps telling me. But what about my Sky Riders, Ellen, and the children? What about my . . . Jimmy?"

Nikolidis waved his gun muzzle vaguely at the wall of scrub and trees to their north and said, "As well as I was able to follow the action over the helicopter's radio, one of your comrades would seem to have made a suicide dive into a roadblock. He and the terrorists up there died together in the resultant blast. The Evzones reported another hang-glider crashing out of control, and they are searching the woods for possible survivors. Everyone else would seem to have landed, scattered through the trees and maquis. If you wish, I can get back on the radio and . . ."

But McCabe wasn't listening. Limping, he was running across the broken ground in the direction Nikolidis had pointed.

Beyond the trees, in an open meadow, gone to knee-high weeds and bobbing flowers, Ellen Bracken was running too. She and Martin had touched down gently, but Ben Miller's hang-glider had ground-looped coming in to land, and one triangular wing stood vertical above the sea of green vegetation, like a lurking shark's ominous fin.

As the frantic mother called out her daughter's name, little Susie yelled, "Where are you, Mommy?" and Ben Miller stepped into view from behind the crumpled glider, holding Susie, unharmed, in his arms. Ben's face was gray and his grin was a bit lopsided. It had been a near thing when that wing panel gave out, just above the daisies. They'd been saved more by muscle and sheer luck than any plan of Ben's; he'd simply balled up around the little girl and taken his lumps as the glider crashed.

Ben handed Susie to her mother, who sank to her knees among the flowers, hugging the child and sobbing in sick relief. Susie patted her mother's cheek and said, "It's all right, Mommy. I was scared, but Uncle Ben made it all better."

Ellen looked up at the youth who'd carried her child from the jaws of death and, realizing she didn't know any of their names, said, soberly, "God bless you . . . Ben?"

"Ben Miller. If you girls are all right, I have to find my woman."

"Have you seen my other child, Jimmy?"

"Yeah. He came down with Della. That's who I'm looking for."

Ellen rose, still holding Susie, and said, "Wait, I want to go with you!" as Ben started walking for the corner of the meadow where he'd last seen Della's descending kite. He spotted its torn Dacron on a distant tree and started to run, with Ellen and the little girl following.

On the far side of the meadow, Della was helping Jimmy out of the harness. Jimmy was looking a bit green around the gills, but he was grinning ear to ear as he kept saying, "Wow, we made it! We really and truly flew all the way down off that big mountain!"

Della got the last buckle unfastened, lifted him down to the grassy surface between the trees they'd snagged with the wings, and asked, "Are you ready to go back up and try it again, Jimmy?"

The boy laughed weakly and said, "Not just now, ma'am. It wasn't *that* much fun!"

A man's voice called out, "Della! Della! Are you all

right?" and Della turned, holding Jim by the hand as she waved.

Jim spotted the distant figure of his mother and broke away, yelling, "Mom! Hey, Mom! Guess what I just did!" as he ran to meet her.

He passed Ben Miller, running the other way, and as Ellen knelt again in the gently bobbing flowers, the boy leaped into her arms, hugging his mother and sister and, quite suddenly, bursting into tears.

Behind him, Ben and Della were crying too as they embraced in a passionate kiss. Ben lifted her small booted feet from the ground as he bear-hugged her and mumbled, with his mouth against hers, "I thought I'd lost you! Christ! I really thought I'd lost you!"

Della clung to him and laughed through her tears as she answered, "Let's not ever take a chance like that again. I'm not as brave as I thought I was."

Ben's voice was gruffly tender as he said, "You're going to have to take one more chance, darling. You're going to have to marry me, before I break your arm!"

Others were coming out into the meadow now. Ellen turned as she heard her name being called. One man was kneeling over another, a short distance away. Ellen had never met Captain Nikolidis, but she recognized the fallen man he was giving first aid to. Holding a child by each hand, Ellen hurried over. Jim McCabe looked up at her with a crooked bitter grin as Nikolidis muttered, "Some fools just never know when it is time to quit! First he shoots down a helicopter while he's riding on its landing gear. Then he tries to run with a bullet in his thigh."

Ellen knelt at McCabe's side and stammered, "Jim, I don't know what to say. I don't know how to thank you properly."

McCabe grinned, "There ain't no way that's proper, for a married woman. Watch it. Your old man's coming up behind you to get into my act."

As Ellen turned to wave at Jonas Bracken, running across the meadow toward his wife and children, McCabe added, in a voice that only the captain could hear, "The

guy's always getting into my act, but, what the hey, she needs a steady nine-to-fiver."

Ellen was rushing to meet her husband, holding Susie by the hand. Young Jimmy said, "That's my dad!" and then he turned and stared down thoughtfully at the wounded man at his feet. He asked, "Are you the man who led these others in to save us, mister?"

McCabe shrugged and, as Nikolidis tightened the necktie he'd wrapped above the bullet wound, muttered, "Yeah, kid. How did you like your hang-glider lesson?"

"I was pretty scared, sir."

"It's not so bad, when nobody's shooting at you. You'd better go to your folks . . . son. Your mother's waving at you."

Jimmy nodded and looked over at the reunited Bracken family. Then he suddenly knelt at McCabe's side, held out a hand, and said, "I want to thank you, sir. I don't have anything to give you, but will you shake on it?"

McCabe took the boy's hand, gave it a quick squeeze, and muttered, "That's good enough, son." Then Jimmy bounded up and ran over to his mother, half-sister, and stepfather, calling out, "Hey, Dad! Wait till I tell you what happened!"

McCabe watched them, musing, "He's a pretty tough little guy, isn't he?"

Nikolidis smiled softly and said, "Like father, like son. The ambulance will be here any minute. They will have you up and around in no time. By the way, how is my old friend Karl Auerbach? Is he still selling smuggled electronic gear?"

"You want he should smuggle *dope?* Get off my back, Nikolidis. You can't bust either one of us and you know it."

"Ah, well, we shall see, after you recover from this momentary bout of altruism."

He got to his feet, adding, "Just stay there for the moment. I shall send some stretcher bearers, but I must see to the others. Two of your people are unaccounted for."

He walked away through the weeds, shouting some-

thing in Greek to a passing Evzone. McCabe lay where he was, propped on one elbow, as he tried to make sense of the total confusion around him. In the distance, a big white helicopter was landing, a red cross painted on its fat banana fuselage. McCabe picked a flower with his free hand and chewed the stem. He was dying for a smoke.

Ellen came back over, alone. Bracken and the children were at a discreet distance, and it was obvious his ex-wife had asked her current husband to baby-sit. Like him or not, old Jonas had class.

Ellen stood, looking down at McCabe, and asked, "How's your leg?"

"It hurts like hell. What's up?"

"Jonas wanted me to tell you the reward will be waiting for you at the hospital. He . . . he and I were wondering . . . well, what about Jimmy? Do you want us to tell him?"

"Tell him? Tell him what, for Chrissake?"

"That his real father is a very brave man?"

"Aw, shit, why mix him up? How many fathers does one kid need? Jonas is okay, honey. I hate to admit it, but, yeah, you did the right thing ten years ago. I was pretty pissed off, but . . . for God's sake, what do you want me to say?"

"You said it all, Jim. This time, your actions spoke louder than words. God bless you, Jim. God bless you and . . . thank you. Thank you for what you just did, and thank you for proving I wasn't a complete fool for having loved you once."

"Aw, shit, get out of here before we both start blubbering all over each other!"

Ellen nodded and turned away. McCabe watched her for a long moment, then looked away. There was something in his eye, and the goddam medics were taking too long with that stretcher.

☆☆☆☆

Martin and an Evzone private bent over Joe Thomas as the man who had ridden McCabe's hang-glider down to a Chinese landing in the maquis asked, "What's with Cora? I know the others made it, but Cora was going down like a rock when I last saw her."

Martin examined the improvised splint on Joe's leg as the Evzone cut him out of the harness. Martin said, "Your leg looks pretty good. We'll have you out of these bushes in a minute."

"Yeah, yeah, but what about Cora? Rudy bought the farm, I know. I saw the way he went, Martin. Jesus, old Rudy went out with a lot of class, you know?"

"I saw it too. He took three of the mothers with him, and these Greek dudes wiped the shit out of most of the others. You just rest easy and we'll load you in with McCabe. He took a round in the leg. I got to see can anyone find Cora."

Martin left Joe Thomas in the soldier's care and started pushing through the maquis and tangled trees. He'd seen Cora going down and had an idea of her general direction. Others had watched her crash too, and the woods around him echoed to the hoarse calls of searching soldiers and police.

Martin shoved through some branches and a metallic glitter caught his eye from the forest litter just ahead. He dogged over to it and knelt to pick it up. He'd been right; it was the noseplate of a hang-glider.

A yard-long length of Duralumin tubing lay a few feet

beyond, with a scrap of torn Dacron still attached to it. Martin scrambled through the woods, finding bits and pieces of Cora's kite. But, where the hell was Cora?

He stood bewildered, staring down at the king post and a ten-foot length of tangled flying wire. He shoved another branch aside, peered into an empty clearing, and shouted, "Cora? Where the hell you *at,* girl?"

Somewhere a low moan answered his shout. Martin looked back the way he'd come and repeated, "Cora?"

The girl groaned, "Up *here,* you jerk!"

Martin looked up and gasped. Cora was hanging in her harness, her swaying boots ten feet above his head. The few tubes remaining of her smashed hang-glider were wedged among the pine boughs above her.

Martin went to the nearest tree trunk, shouting, "Can't you get down? What are you doing up there?"

Cora grimaced and replied, "Taking a sun bath. I broke my goddam arm. I've been trying to shuck this harness with one hand, but . . ."

"You just stay put, girl! I'll get some help and we'll have you down in no time at all!"

"I'm not going anywhere. What happened to the others? I saw Rudy buy it, but is Jim all right?"

"Everyone but Rudy made it," Martin yelled, running back the way he'd come. He burst out into the open meadow, spotted two soldiers with a stretcher, and yelled, "Over here!"

He saw them turn his way as, beyond them, others were loading Jim McCabe into the big white ambulance chopper.

Martin returned to Cora and climbed up into the tree beside her. He drew his trench knife and asked, "How's the other arm?"

"It's okay. You're sure Jim's all right? I mean, he was left up there without a pair of wings, and I've been hanging here going out of my gourd with worry."

Martin examined her webbing, muttering, "Chick's hung up in a tree with a busted flipper and she's worried about her Jim. Kee-rist!"

Cora flushed and admitted, "Okay. So the guy turns me on, is there any law against that?"

"No, but you're likely to get hurt, Momma. Listen, I'm gonna cut you partway out, tie your harness to my belt, and we'll slide down this tree trunk together. Just let me cut a branch to splint your break first, hear?"

He started cutting a thick bough as Cora asked, "Do you think I've got a chance?"

"What do you mean, a chance? You've only got a busted arm, and I said I'd get you down, didn't I?"

Someone shouted up at them in Greek, and Martin looked down, adding, "Hey, here's some guys who'll help me. I just have to lower you to them and . . ."

"I wasn't talking about getting down, you goof," Cora cut in, "I meant about Jim. Do you think I've got a chance to, well, try and make him happy?"

Martin laughed and said, "If that big bod of yours can't do it, I don't know what can, Momma. How happy he'll make *you* is anybody's guess. That Bracken guy told me that he's going to give us the bread for hauling his wife and kids down off that rock. Why don't you forget that jive fly-boy and settle for a brand-new kite? I'm fixing to get me a lavender Rogallo with white fox-fur trim. I'll bill myself as the Flying Pimp and—You okay?"

Cora was crying uncontrollably as he tied one of her overhead straps to his waist, cut the other, and lowered her gently until her head was level with his shins. He held the knife in his teeth, started inching down the trunk, and soon found her weight taken up by the hands of the two Greek stretcher bearers below. He climbed down a few more feet, saw they had her, and cut her loose.

By the time he'd reached the ground, the soldiers had Cora on the stretcher and were heading for the ambulance chopper. Martin followed, wondering what he'd tell Ben and the others. Between Rudy's death, Joe's broken leg, and this foxy momma's crush on that knockaround old turkey McCabe, the Sky Riders were going to need replacements as well as some new hang-gliders.

Martin followed Cora's stretcher across the meadow to the waiting ambulance chopper. As they were loading her inside, Martin spotted McCabe inside, stretched out on a litter with a brandy bottle and a wicked grin. Joe

lay just beyond McCabe, unconscious from the morphine they'd given him for the pain in his compound fracture.

McCabe and Cora saw each other at the same time. Cora gasped, "Oh, Jimbo, I was so scared. I thought I'd lost you!"

McCabe shot her a puzzled look. Then, catching the warning in Martin's frowning eyes, McCabe said, "Have some brandy, kid. I thought I'd lost you, too."

The big girl blushed like a schoolgirl as she took the bottle from him. Martin turned away from the hatch, meeting the sardonic glance of Captain Nikolidis.

Nikolidis nodded, as if he'd read Martin's mind, and said, "They are both crazy, but all of you are crazy. Such flying as yours should be confined to a lunatic asylum."

He looked in at McCabe and Cora to shout, "Congratulations, Mr. McCabe. The Bracken family is reunited and on their way back to Athens, thanks to you and these others. Considering the odds, you were all very lucky."

He stepped back, shouted in Greek, and, as the hatch began to close, turned to Martin to ask, "Do you and the others have transportation back to the city?"

Martin said, "Van and truck way over yonder, behind that sawtooth ridge. We could use a lift over there. I'll get Ben and Della."

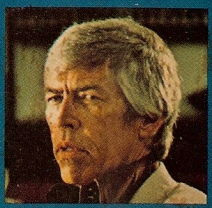
They ducked to run out of the blast as the helicopter blades began to turn. A few feet out, Martin added, "Ben and his momma won't like this new deal Cora's getting into. You think that old dude's gonna make a play for her?"

Nikolidis laughed as they walked together to join Ben and Della. As the ambulance chopper lifted off, Nikolidis said, "Between you and me, my young friend, I do not think Jim McCabe has anything to say about it."

ONLY THE HANG-GLIDING DAREDEVILS COULD SAVE THE TERRORISTS' KIDNAP VICTIMS

ROBERT CULP

SUSANNAH YORK



JAMES COBURN

McCabe was what they call a knock-around guy. He could fly just about any plane you might want for smuggling. He knew guns, and whom to bribe, and where to find a guy for a special job. But where do you find people to storm a mountain fortress—swiftly, silently, before the murderous fanatics inside have time to kill their hostages?

You need a gang of bravos—cool, hard, in top condition, gamblers with death—with some kind of magical extra.

There was money in it for McCabe if he could pull it off. But for once McCabe was stumped.

Until he met the hang-gliding sky riders, doing their thing at a country fair.

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